

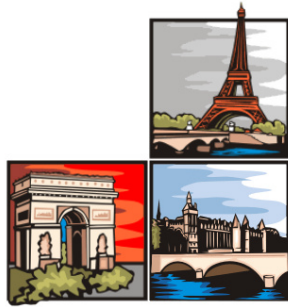
Expedition: Europe

PARIS

26 Jan 03 - 31 Jan 03



RICHARD G RUSSO



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"'Expedition: Europe | Paris' -- Reflections of Life" is a journal depicting real-life events. Names, places, and events are real and have not been fabricated.



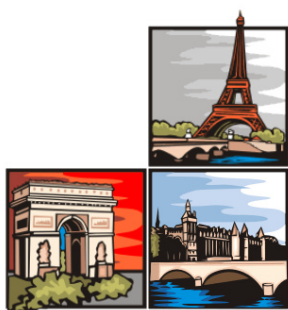
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Expedition: Europe



Paris, FR

“Le Chunnel Tunnel”

SUNDAY, JANUARY 26+H

Under the English Channel

Although the title “Le Chunnel Tunnel” is somewhat a misnomer – Chunnel itself being a colloquial contraction of channel and tunnel – it somehow fits; it just rolls off the tongue, doesn’t it? At the moment this is where Cedric, Maya and I can be found: under the untold millions of gallons of water in the English Channel onboard a British Rail Class 373 Eurostar train bound for Paris.

Outside, the air is rushing past somewhere around 300 kilometers (186 miles) per hour but inside we’re quite comfortable and cozy here in seats 72, 73 and 74 of Coach #3. I’m quite happy (and relieved) to report that our assigned seats are all facing the same direction as the train’s forward motion (as I would hate to have my first adventure on a high-speed train ruined by a sour stomach) and that we’re seated next to one of the car’s big windows. So far so good; the ride is actually quieter than I had imagined and very, very smooth. It’s such a contrast from our rather harried departure at London-Waterloo International. People were everywhere! Sitting on the floor, leaning against the walls, even standing in line for the loo – there was no getting away from the throngs of travelers moving about this morning. It was quite a sight to see.

Waterloo is quite the station, too – I am impressed! Although we had visited the station earlier in the week to have our Eurail passes validated (a \$500 USD ticket that would give us daily passage on most trains operating in the EU for ten days – our main method of passage), this morning’s departure was the first we’d spend any actual length of time within. The complex contains twenty-five platforms in service to various rail companies and routes, including the Eurostar network, which actually operates out of platforms 20-24 from the “international” side of the complex. It’s not hard to pick it out either – it’s the one with a 400m long glass and steel vault of 37 arches.

Did You Know?

Did you know the London-Waterloo rail complex ranks as one of the busiest passenger terminals in Europe? It has more platforms and a greater floor area than any other railway station in the United Kingdom and ranks second to Gare du Nord in Paris to total patronage. Gare du Nord, consequently, is the Parisian terminus of the Eurostar train.



At least we got through French customs without incident (yeah, you do that BEFORE boarding the train – isn’t that smart?)

At the moment here, though, there's not much to see – we're deep underground now – but there's plenty to study up on. There's the Chunnel to learn about, I've been reading about the history of London (more to encapsulate the experience I've had), and, of course, about navigating in Paris.

First, a summation of what I've learned about London's history.

Interestingly enough, the early inhabitants of Britain (the Iberians) are those whose ingenuity and enterprise are believed to have created Stonehenge but very little is known about them. They were replaced by the iron-wielding Celts, whose massive invasions around 500 B.C. drove the Iberians back to the Scottish Highlands and Welsh mountains. In 54 B.C., Julius Caesar invaded England and went as far as Caledonia (now Scotland), where they gave up. The wall, built by Emperor Hadrian across the north of England, marked the northernmost reaches of the Roman Empire. During almost 4 centuries of occupation, the Romans built roads, villas, towns, walls, and fortresses; they farmed the land and introduced first their pagan religions, then Christianity. Agriculture and trade flourished.

When the Roman legions withdrew around A.D. 410, they left the country open to waves of invasions by Jutes, Angles, and Saxons, who established themselves in small kingdoms throughout the former Roman colony. From the 8th through the 11th century, the Anglo-Saxons contended with Danish raiders for control of the land. By the time of the Norman Conquest (1066), the Saxon kingdoms were united under an elected king, Edward the Confessor. Norman rule had an enormous impact on English society. Under William I, all high offices were held by Normans, and the Norman barons were given great grants of land; they built Norman-style castles and strongholds throughout the country. French was the language of the court for centuries. In fact, few people realize that heroes such as Richard the Lionheart probably spoke little or no English!

In 1154, Henry II, the first of the Plantagenets, was crowned. This remarkable character in English history ruled a vast empire – not only most of Britain but Normandy, Anjou, Brittany, and Aquitaine in France. He reformed the courts and introduced the system of common law, which still operates in moderated form in England today and also influenced the American legal system. But Henry is best remembered for ordering the infamous murder of Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. Two of Henry's sons were crowned kings of England. Richard the Lionheart actually spent most of his life outside England, on crusades, or in France. John was forced by his nobles to sign the Magna Carta at Runnymede in 1215. The Magna Carta guaranteed that the king was subject to the rule of law and gave certain rights to the king's subjects, beginning a process that eventually led to the development of parliamentary democracy as it is known in Britain today. The Magna Carta became known as the cornerstone of English liberties.

In 1348, half the population died as the Black Death ravaged England. England also suffered in the Hundred Years' War, which went on intermittently for more than a century. By 1371, England had lost much of its land on French soil. Henry V, immortalized by Shakespeare, revived England's claims to France, and his victory at Agincourt was notable for making obsolete the forms of medieval chivalry and warfare.

After Henry's death in 1422, disputes among successors to the crown resulted in a long period of civil strife: the Wars of the Roses between the Yorkists, who used a white rose as their symbol, and the Lancastrians with their red rose. The last Yorkist king was Richard III; he was defeated at Bosworth Field and the victory introduced England to the first Tudor, the shrewd and wily Henry VII.

The Tudors were unlike the kings who had ruled before them.

They introduced into England a strong central monarchy with far-reaching powers. Henry VIII is surely the most notorious Tudor. Imperious and flamboyant, a colossus among English royalty, he slammed shut the door on the Middle Ages and introduced the Renaissance to England. He is best known, of course, for his treatment of his six wives and the unfortunate fates that befell five of them. Henry's first wife, Catherine of Aragon, failed to produce an heir. His ambitious mistress, Anne Boleyn, became pregnant, and he tried to annul his marriage, but the pope refused, and Catherine contested the action. Defying the power of Rome, Henry had his marriage with Catherine declared invalid and secretly married Anne Boleyn in 1533. The events that followed had profound consequences and introduced the religious controversy that was to dominate English politics for the next 4 centuries.

Henry was succeeded by heir Edward VI who was succeeded by his sister, Mary I. Mary restored the Roman Catholic faith; her persecution of the adherents of the Church of England earned her the name of "Bloody Mary" – some 300 Protestants were executed, many burned alive at the stake. Elizabeth I (reigned 1558-1603) came next to the throne, ushering in an era of peace and prosperity, exploration, and a renaissance in science and learning. An entire age was named after her: the Elizabethan age. She was the last great and grand monarch to rule England, and her passion and magnetism were said to match her father's. Through her era marched Drake, Raleigh, Frobisher, Grenville, Shakespeare, Spenser, Byrd, and Hilliard.

The reign of Charles II was the beginning of a dreadful decade that saw London decimated by the Great Plague and destroyed by the Great Fire.

His successor, James II, attempted to return the country to Catholicism, an attempt that so frightened the powers that be that Catholics were for a long time deprived of their civil rights. James was deposed in the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 and succeeded by his daughter Mary (1662-94) and William of Orange (1650-1702). These tolerant and levelheaded monarchs signed a bill of rights, establishing the principle that the monarch reigns not by divine right but by the will of Parliament. The American colonies were lost under the Hanoverian George III, but other British possessions were expanded: Canada was won from the French in the Seven Years' War (1756-63), British control over India was affirmed, and Captain Cook claimed Australia and New Zealand for England. The British became embroiled in the Napoleonic Wars (1795-1815), achieving two of their greatest victories and acquiring two of their greatest heroes: Nelson at Trafalgar and Wellington at Waterloo.

Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901) coincided with the height of the Industrial Revolution. The Victorian era was shaped by the growing power of the bourgeoisie, the Queen and her consort's personal moral stance, and the perceived moral responsibilities of managing a vast empire. Middle-class values ruled Victorian England and were embodied by the Queen. The racy England of the past went underground. But the World Wars would mark the end of this era where it had been assumed that peace, progress, prosperity, empire and even social improvement would continue indefinitely. In the years following WWI and WWII, many changes came to England. Britain began to lose its grip on an empire and that brought with it many profound social and identity changes, which still haunt and shape Britons to this day.

Even so they've managed to prosper again. All one has to do is take a glance at London's skyline or, as I'm doing now, traverse the Chunnel - it's quite a unique experience!

If I recall correctly, construction began on the Channel Tunnel sometime in 1988 using a number of high-capacity boring machines. Workers from both sides of the Channel toiled day and night for years until the two sides met unceremoniously two years later (on October 30th, 1990). Another four more years of hard labor was necessary to complete the project, but on May 6, 1994, construction was completed and the tunnel was opened for rail transport. By the numbers: the Channel Tunnel is a 50.5-kilometer (31.4 mile) undersea rail tunnel linking Folkestone, Kent (near Dover) in the United Kingdom, with Coquelles, Pas-de-Calais (near Calais) in northern France, at the Strait of Dover.

The Channel Tunnel consists of three bores (or shafts): two 7.6-metre (25 feet) diameter rail tunnels, 30 meters (98 feet) apart, 50 kilometers (31 miles) in length with a 4.8-metre (16 feet) diameter service tunnel in between. Between the portals at Beussingue and Castle Hill the tunnel consists of 3.3 kilometers (2 miles) under land on the French side, 9.3 kilometers (6 miles) under land on the UK side and 37.9 kilometers (23.5 miles) under sea. This makes the Channel Tunnel the second longest rail tunnel in the world, behind the Seikan Tunnel in Japan, but with the longest under-sea section. Consequently at its lowest point, the tunnel reaches 75 meters (250 feet) under the surface. It cost approximately £4,650 million to construct.

And it's thanks to everyone's hard work and ingenuity that I have the privilege of traveling to Paris on it. I'm so excited! And, unfortunately, I'm nervous as well.

Navigating London, after learning a bit about English culture and the intertwining routes of the Underground, proved to be a simple task, but there's one caveat – everything is in English and therefore understandable at first glance. In Paris, where French (obviously) is the language of the land, getting around and being understood is sure to be more of a hassle, wouldn't you think? Even more so if you couple the fact the French seem to hate Americans. So, yeah, I'm a bit nervous about arriving in Paris and saddened to be leaving London. I know, I know – yesterday I was all for continuing on but now that it is actually happening... I don't know what to think.

I'm going to miss the British's singular humor, though, I'm sure.

One of the things I found very positive was the “Love is...” campaign found in the London Underground. It’s a series of posters based on the “Love is...” comic strip by New Zealand artist Kim Grove in the late 1960s. Here the familiar male and female characters from the strip are used to show “best behaviors” to adhere to while using the Underground, or known in country as: Tube etiquette.



LOVE IS...

- ...not putting your feet on the seat.
- ...not eating smelly food.
- ...moving down the carriage.
- ...not listening to loud music.
- ...considering others when carrying baggage.
- ...letting the elderly sit down.
- ...not dropping litter.
- ...letting people off first.

I thought they were cutsey, don't you?

Oh well, there's no turning back now!

Caulaincourt Square

Bonsoir! Bienvenue à Paris!

(Good Evening! Welcome to Paris!)

We're here! Believe it or not the three of us disembarked the Eurostar train, having survived the Chunnel (and Parisian customs) and entered France relatively unscathed. And we have a nice arrival stamp in our passports to boot!

We've just settled into our hostel – Caulaincourt Hôtel at 2 Square Caulaincourt, 75018 Paris – and boy does it have character. Upon first glance it is very similar to the Rosedene: filled with all the charm of a small, comfortable and cheap hotel; alas there is no escaping its French flair though: warm, petite and bohème. Although there are dorm-like rooms advertised on property, we splurged and once again procured a room all to ourselves, complete with our very own shower and toilet facilities. Finding the room, though, was rather interesting: from the lobby we were instructed to head down a flight of stairs, turn left down the hallway, then up two flights at the next stairwell. The room itself is nothing spectacular – three single beds and a table with a lamp – but they are a welcome sight.

Just outside my window is “The City of Lights” and I almost cannot believe it. Although we've seen just a very, very, very small slice of the city arriving at our hostel, the feeling here in Paris is so drastically different than London. The smells, the sounds, and the atmosphere – it's all exciting!

Although I admit I'm a little pooped out to appreciate it tonight.

Cold and rainy conditions greeted us on the platform at *Gare du Nord* (“North Station”), a rather large transit station featuring over forty platforms for the multitude of trains that come in and out, with names and logos I am not yet completely familiar – Eurostar, Thalys, TGV, Transilien, and RER – but I'd be lying if I didn't say I wasn't utterly fascinated by it all. As I stated before, mass transit options fascinate me to no end and I look forward to mastering the system in Paris.

In trying to make sense of the public transportation options available to us, though, I've come to the inescapable conclusion that rapid-transit in Paris appears to be just as complicated as it was in London – there are a number of networks (both below and above ground) and options from which to choose. There is the *Métropolitain de Paris*, the main underground network; the *Réseau Express Régional* (or RER), a regional medium-rail network; the *Transilien*, a commuter-type rail system; the Tramway, a non-elevated light-rail network; and a trio of bus networks with a multitude of routes and stops between them (about 8,000 individual bus stops). Managed, of course, by a bewildering blend of semi-governmental organizations: the *Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens* (Independent Paris Transport Authority), or RATP, and the *Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français* (French National Railway Company), or SNCF.

The Métro and Tramway is managed primarily by the RATP; the commuter network by the SNCF; and the RER jointly by both. Although it sounds confusing – and it is – the networks are easy to distinguish, denoted M, T, BUS or RER depending.

Looking over the network map, I don't foresee us using the bus network, or the Tramway; neither tram routes are in the heart of Paris – Line T1 serves north of Paris, connecting Saint-Denis to Noisy-le-Sec; Line T2 services south Paris, connecting La Défense with Porte de Versailles – so at the moment I sincerely doubt we'll get a chance to ride either. The RER is a different matter, though.

The RER (*Réseau Express Régional*) is the regional express transit system serving Paris and its outer suburbs. The system is an integration of a modern city-center subway with a pre-existing set of regional rail lines. Within the city of Paris, the RER serves as an express network, offering multiple connections with the Métro. Outside the city's boundaries, the system serves as an inter-connecting link between the various neighborhoods of Paris' suburbs and outlying environs. The network consists of five lines labeled A (red), B (blue), C (yellow), D (green) and E (purple), which cross into and out of the city at various points, including branch points. Line A has five different branches, Line B four, Line C has seven, and Lines D and E have three each.



Line	Stops	Year	Length
A	46	1969	108.5 km 67.4 mi
B	47	1977	80.0 km 49.7 mi
C	84	1979	185.6 km 115.3 mi
D	59	1987	197.0 km 122.4 mi
E	21	1999	52.3 km 32.5 mi

I believe we're going to have to use RER Line A to reach Disneyland Paris but I can't be sure if we're going to use the rest of the network, but at least I'm familiar with it now. I wonder... which branch will we have to use? I guess we'll find out later on in the week, no? There is plenty of transportation opportunities around; knowing which to take, in what direction, and where to get off is the problem!

Riding the *Métropolitain* proved to be painful.

Lines are identified by number (rather than name) and direction of travel is indicated by the destination terminus (rather than by the direction they're traveling). Can you imagine the three of us standing before the map on the station platform? With a system consisting of sixteen separate lines, stretching over a 214 kilometer (133 mile) network from which to choose and 300 stations representing 384 some-odd stops we could make, I'm not entirely sure how we arrived here, but I think we took Line 4 toward *Port de Clignancourt* then transferred over to Line 12 at *Marcadet Poissonniers* and rode in the direction of *Mairie d'Issy* and disembarked at *Lamarck Caulaincourt*, as shown in the map excerpt.



Although the *Métropolitain de Paris* isn't the world's oldest underground system – the London Underground can boast that claim – it is one of Europe's busiest metro systems, taking second only after the *Moskovskiy metropoliten* – the Moscow Metro. With 245 stations serving an 86.9 square kilometer (34 square mile) area, it is also one of the densest networks in the world – highly copied.

All of the metro stations are within Paris' traditional city limits, I see, so marked by a circular motor beltway called the Boulevard Périphérique. Sixteen lines serve on this underground network, numbered and colored accordingly. The direction of the train is identified by the last station on the line in that direction (so the terminus must be known beforehand) and connections can be made between lines at certain stations (referred to as *correspondances*). They say you're never far from a metro station in Paris (no point in the city is more than 300 yards from one) and after reading these figures I can believe it. As with London, the chart below details the lines that are in operation today, which we'll be using as the days go by: “#” denotes the line number, “St” denotes the number of stations serviced on the line, “Year” denotes the first year the line was operating, “Length” denotes the total track length of the line, and “Route” are the two terminal stations of the line.

Saviez-vous Que?

Did you know the first line of the *Métropolitain de Paris* opened quietly during the Exposition Universelle (the World's Fair) on July 19, 1900? The Exposition Universelle was where talking films and escalators were first publicized, and where Campbell's Soup was awarded a gold medal (an image of which still appears on its label). The Eiffel Tower was also constructed for the Exposition.

#	St	Year	Length	Route
1	25	1900	16.6 km 10.3 mi	La Défense to Château de Vincennes
2	25	1900	12.3 km 7.7 mi	Porte Dauphine to Nation
3	25	1904	11.7 km 7.3 mi	Pont de Levallois to Gallieni
3-	4	1971	01.3 km 0.8 mi	Porte des Lilas to Gambetta
4	26	1908	10.6 km 6.6 mi	Porte de Clignancourt to Porte d'Orléans
5	22	1906	14.6 km 9.1 mi	Bobigny to Place d'Italie
6	28	1909	13.6 km 8.5 mi	Charles de Gaulle - Étoile to Nation
7	38	1910	22.4 km 13.9 mi	La Courneuve to Villejuif / Mairie d'Ivry
7-	8	1967	03.1 km 1.9 mi	Louis Blanc to Pré Saint-Gervais
8	37	1913	22.1 km 13.8 mi	Balard to Créteil
9	37	1922	19.6 km 12.2 mi	Pont de Sèvres to Mairie de Montreuil
10	23	1923	11.7 km 7.3 mi	Boulogne to Gare d'Austerlitz
11	13	1935	06.3 km 3.9 mi	Châtelet to Mairie des Lilas
12	28	1910	13.9 km 8.6 mi	Porte de la Chapelle to Mairie d'Issy
13	32	1911	24.3 km 15.0 mi	Châtillon - Montrouge to Saint-Denis / Les Courtilles
14	9	1998	09.0 km 5.6 mi	Saint-Lazare to Olympiades

Although intriguing historically, the Paris Métro doesn't seem to have the same charm as the London Underground... no more Bakerloo, Piccadilly, or Victoria lines to call from, just line 1, 2, 3, 4, and so on.

So, what made the ride distressing?

Besides the number of lines and transfer options available to us, once we actually got down into the system it became painfully obvious that there were no escalators. Station Lamarck-Caulaincourt, our home station, is some 100 steps below ground! And not your typical see-saw style steps either, these spiraled up and up and up and up. Am I being punished for having a suitcase on wheels? I digress.

On the way over, besides reading about London I also brushed up on Parisian history.

Paris emerged at the crossroads of three major traffic arteries on the muddy island in the Seine that today is known as Ile de la Cité. The island served as the fortified headquarters of the Parisii tribe, who called it Lutétia. The two wooden bridges connecting the island to the river's left and right banks were among the regions' most strategically important, and the settlement attracted the attention of the Roman Empire. In his Commentaries, Julius Caesar described his conquest of Lutétia, recounting how its bridges were burned during the Gallic War of 52 B.C. and how the town on the island was pillaged, sacked, and transformed into a Roman-controlled stronghold. Within a century, Lutétia became a full-fledged Roman town.

During the 400s, with the decline of the Roman armies, Germanic tribes from the east were able to invade the island, founding a Frankish dynasty. The first of these Frankish kings, Clovis (466-511), founder of the Merovingian dynasty, embraced Christianity as his tribe's religion and spearheaded an explicit rejection of Roman cultural imperialism by encouraging the adoption of Parisii place names such as "Paris," which came into common usage during this time.

The Merovingians were replaced by the Carolingians, whose heyday began with Charlemagne's coronation in 800. But the Carolingians came to an end less than 200 years later, when the empire fragmented due to growing regional, political, and linguistic divisions between what would become modern France and modern Germany. Paris became the seat of a new dynasty, the Capetians, whose kings ruled France throughout the Middle Ages. During this time, Paris began to merge as a great city, boasting a university that attracted scholars from all over Europe. Its population increased as did its mercantile activity. Throughout the 1200s, a frenzy of construction transformed the skyline.

As time passed, Paris's fortunes became closely linked to the power struggles between the French monarchs in Paris and the various highly competitive feudal lords of the provinces. Civil unrest, takeovers by one warring faction after another, and a dangerous alliance between the English and the powerful rulers of Burgundy during the Hundred Year's War lead to France's decline. To the humiliation of the French monarchs, the English invaded the city in 1422. Joan of Arc tried unsuccessfully to re-conquer Paris in 1429, and was later burned at the stake by the English for her troubles. Paris was further reduced to poverty and economic stagnation, but despite Joan of Arc's tragic end, the revolution she inspired continued until Paris was finally taken from the English in 1436.

Under the leadership of Louis XI (1423-83), France witnessed an accelerating rate of change that included the transformation of a feudal and medieval social system into the nascent structure of a modern state. From the shelter of dozens of elegant urban residences, France's aristocracy imbued Paris with its sense of architectural and social style, as well as the Renaissance's mores and manners. The era of Louis XIV (1638-1715) marked the emergence of the French kings as absolute monarchs. As if to concretize their power, they embellished Paris with many of the monuments that still serve as its symbols.

Meanwhile, the rising power of England represented a serious threat to France. One of the many theaters of the Anglo-French conflict was the American Revolution, during which the French kings supported the Americans in their struggle against the Crown. Ironically, within 15 years, the revolutionary fervor the monarchs had nurtured crossed the Atlantic destroyed them. The Enlightenment and its philosophers had fostered a new generation of thinkers who opposed absolutism, religious fanaticism, and superstition. Revolution had been brewing for almost 50 years, and after the French Revolution's explosive events, Europe was completely changed.

It required the militaristic fervor of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) to unite France once again. Considered then and today a strategic genius with almost limitless ambition, he restored to Paris and France a national pride that had diminished during the Revolution's horror. Napoleon's victories had made him the envy of Europe, but his infamous retreat from Moscow during the winter of 1812 reduced his formerly invincible army to tatters. After a complicated series of events that included his return from exile, Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo by the armies of the English, the Dutch, and the Prussians sending him once again into exile where he would die. In the power vacuum that followed Napoleon's expulsion and death, Paris became the scene of intense lobbying over France's future. The Bourbon monarchy was soon reestablished, but with reduced powers. In 1830, the regime was overthrown and Louis-Philippe (1773-1850) was elected king.

In 1848, a series of revolutions spread from one European capital to the next. The violent upheaval in Paris revealed the dissatisfaction of members of the working class. Fueled by a financial crash and scandals in the government, the revolt forced Louis-Philippe out. That year, Emperor Napoleon's nephew, Napoleon III (1808-73), was elected president. Appealing to the property-owning instinct of a nation that hadn't forgotten the violent Revolution of less than a century before, he established a right-wing government and assumed complete power as emperor in 1851 and declared the Second Empire.

In 1853, Napoleon III undertook Europe's largest urban redevelopment project to redesign Paris, which created a vast network of boulevards interconnected with a series of squares that cut across old neighborhoods giving the capital the look for which it's now famous. By 1866, the entrepreneurs of an increasingly industrialized Paris began to regard the Second Empire as a hindrance. In 1870, during the Franco-Prussian War, the Prussians defeated Napoleon III at Sedan and held him prisoner, along with 100,000 of his soldiers. The events of 1870 ushered in the Third Republic and under the Third Republic, peace and prosperity gradually returned, and Paris regained its glamour.

Viola!

We're a little hungry – we've not had “real food” all day – so we're gonna kip out for a small bite to eat. We passed a wonderful smelling restaurant on our walk here. It's just down the street a block or two and they have crepes on the menu. You can't beat that! It's called *Le Cépage Montmartrois* and we'll see how well we're received.

It's time to charge up the laptop's batteries anyway. France uses an entirely different plug configuration and voltage regulation than the United Kingdom, so once again I need to dig into my bag of tricks for my voltage converter and plug adaptor. They have some crazy three-pronged plugs here too... I hope my laptop doesn't explode while we're out!



Jusque-là! (until then!)

Expedition: Europe

Paris, FR



“Champs du Mars”

MONDAY, JANUARY 27^{+H} 2003 - PART I

Boum!

Le monde entier fait boum

Tout avec lui dit boum

Quand notre coeur fait boum-boum!

Boum, Boum! I loooooooooooooove this city!

It's hard to believe that it was just yesterday I was feeling nervous and apprehensive about coming to Paris. After spending the day on these magnificent streets by foot, I find that I can't get enough. I absolutely love this city – it is incredible! *C'est magnifique!* The weather cooperated splendidly today to give such us a smashing day – although bitterly cold at dawn, the conditions improved by noon to give us clear blue skies with nary a wisp of cloud (well, once the fog burned off), slight, cool breezes slipping into our hats and over our scarves, and a high, affectionate sun who's rays kept our gloved hands and jacketed torsos pleasantly warm. We couldn't have asked for better. The only complaint: that it had to come to an end.



It's night-time now; the breezes have turned chilly and the skies dark, the sun long now into its daily slumber. We've closed ourselves up in our room here at Caulaincourt Square fitfully trying to keep warm – there is a distinct lack of heat emanating from the only radiator supplied and I suspect there's little to no insulation in these walls what so ever – but our spirits are high. Cedric and Maya are occupying a bed over on the far wall; Cedric listening to his music while Maya is taking a quick shower. I, of course, am over here next to the window (not so sure that was a great choice) hiding under one of the thin blankets we were given upon check-in, shivering but resting. And, of course, chronicling today's activities.

As such, our day started without much of a chore – in fact all three of us were up and ready to go by 8:30am; can you believe that? Kipping off to bed early last night aided with that greatly. To be honest both Cedric and Maya woke up before me and took to the streets of our neighborhood – Montmartre – in search for breakfast.

By the time they returned with an assortment of pastries and juices (yum, yum, yum!) I was clean shaven, dressed and prepared for the adventure ahead. I was quickly introduced to a “pain au chocolate”, a wonderfully delicious and flakey croissant filled with milk or dark chocolate chunks, and a “thé de pêche”, or Peach Tea. Although not a fan of either canned iced tea or peaches (and their juice), the two together complimented the chocolate well and believe it or not, was quite a refreshing start to my morning.

After our tummies became full of the wonderful buttery, light, flakey pastries Maya brought us we set out into the square, then down the street to the metro and began to navigate our way. We had an enormous agenda too: the Louvre, the Tuileries, the Champs-Élysées, and the Arc de Triomphe. But our first stop was everything quintessential about Paris: the tower that Eiffel built.

Eiffel Tower



The Eiffel Tower strikes a unique pose on the Champ de Mars in the 7th arrondissement of Paris, one that dominates the landscape more so here than from anywhere else in the city. To reach it we had to jump through quite a few hoops on Paris' confusing metro system: descending underground at *Lamarck-Coulaincourt* to ride Line 12 in the direction of *Mairie d'Issy* to *Pigalle*; transferring at *Pigalle* to Line 2 and taking it to *Charles de Gaulle-Etoile* in the direction of *Porte Dauphine*; switching once again to Line 6 in the direction of *Nation* to our final destination. Coming upon the tower after a brief walk down Quai Branley from Bir-Hakeim, the closest metro station, is a singular treat. It is here one can finally appreciate just how massive the tower really is, and revel in its shadow; remember, you're standing in the presence of an icon. By the time we arrived the tower had just opened; therefore crowds were at a minimum. The only unfortunate circumstance was its cloak of fog. It hadn't quite cleared off by the time we got there. Alas, we purchased tickets to ride anyway and made our way up the 325-meter tower despite the conditions.

Named after its designer, engineer Gustave Eiffel, the Tower is one of the most recognizable structures in the world. It is also one of the tallest buildings in all of Paris, immediately commanding your attention amongst the city's famous skyline. The tower's four pillars, in line with the four cardinal points of a compass, measure 125 meters on each side and converge 325-meters (1,063 feet) up. At the time of its construction it was the world's tallest tower, but it lost that title in 1930 upon completion of New York City's Chrysler Building. Even so, it's a marvel in its own right.

The structure was built between 1887 and 1889 as the entrance arch for the Exposition Universelle, a World's Fair marking the centennial celebration of the French Revolution. Three hundred workers joined together 18,038 pieces of puddled iron, using two and a half million rivets and weighing in at 7,300 tons. Combined with all the other non-metal components, the Tower weights an impressive 10,000 tons. Although it is firmly affixed to the ground, depending on the ambient temperature the top of the tower may shift away from the sun by up to 18-centimeters (7 inches) because of thermal expansion of the metal. In windy conditions it's not unusual to feel the tower sway up to 7 centimeters (3 inches) in the wind.

Saviez-vous Que?

Did you know it takes approximately 60 tons of paint to cover the entire Tower? The current color of the Tower, adopted in 1968 after several color changes ranging from the original reddish-brown to ochre-yellow, is a three-tone variation of bronze. The darkest shade is used on the bottom and the lightest at the top to maintain a uniform appearance to observers and to ensure a perfectly hued compliment to the color of the Paris sky. The tower is repainted every 7 years to protect it from rust.

Thankfully neither condition was true this morning, so we were assured a smooth ride up.



The journey to the top is done two-fold. A before-mentioned ticket booth at the south tower base sells billets to give visitors access to the “second observation deck”, or second floor. This is the medium-sized square base in the middle of the tower, approximately 115 meters from the ground (the first floor, consequently, the larger base, houses a restaurant). To reach the second floor one can take the stairs (360 steps to the first floor then another 359 to the second) or the lift, which

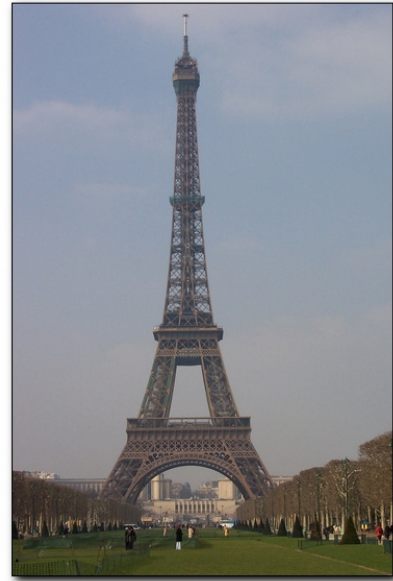
transcends the legs diagonally. The views from here are first rate – the city becomes smaller and smaller as you ascend, and layouts of the surrounding avenues and structures can finally be seen as an intricate design rather than a jumble of streets, sidewalks, houses, café's and shops. But, the best views come at the top.

Since we held tickets to the lift, we naturally chose that method.

The top of the tower, or “top observation deck” – the highest a tourist can go at 276 meters up – is reached via more stairs (340 of them) or another lift from the second floor. This lift is perfectly vertical, escalating through the very center of the Tower. Both rides offer unique views of the city not available elsewhere. And it would have been even more thrilling if it weren't quite as foggy. The view from the upper deck was so disappointingly obstructed it almost wasn't worth the effort in the first place. Even so, the knowledge that I had an opportunity to go up at all was enough to satisfy. Besides, reaching the top of the tower had other rewards: we stumbled upon a man on bended knee proposing to his lady right there on top of the world!

Although the Tower is one of the most recognized icons worldwide (and very much associated with its host city), it's almost hard to believe that the Parisians during Eiffel's time considered it to be an eyesore. My, how times have changed! History also records a number of attempts to not only change the location of the tower, but to determine whether or not it would still be standing today.

First and foremost were Eiffel's original plans to build the tower in Barcelona for the Universal Exposition of 1888. Had the city not refused, believing the tower was a strange sort, I wouldn't have the pleasure of visiting today. But considering how uniformed Barcelona's buildings and streets appear on a satellite map, I can't fathom a structure as bold as the Eiffel Tower anchoring the city. Secondly, twenty years after its construction, the City of Paris assumed authority over the tower and had plans to demolish it; however, its use as a communications array and subsequent use as a symbol of victory in war prevented its destruction then. It even survived the Nazi Occupation, although ironically just barely. According to accounts at the time, in August 1944 when the Allies were nearing Paris, Hitler ordered General Dietrich von Choltitz (the military governor of Paris) to demolish the tower along with the rest of the city. Von Choltitz disobeyed. Even Montréal wanted in on the tower in 1967 for the Expo it was hosting at the time.



More than 200,000,000 people have visited the tower since its construction in 1889 and now I can be considered one of them, even if Hitler wasn't. It's matter of record today that upon the Nazi occupation of Paris in 1940, the lift cables were cut so that Hitler would have to climb all 1,665 steps to the top should he want to view his prize. He never did. German soldiers climbed to the summit to hoist the swastika but Hitler never made the journey. Thus it is said that although Hitler conquered France, he could not conquer the Eiffel Tower, and thus their spirit. But the Tower has captured mine.

Musée du Louvre

Once we were back on the ground it was just a short jaunt on the Metro to our second destination, the *Musée du Louvre*. Found on the banks of the Seine in the 1st *arrondissement* (neighborhood), the Louvre boasts more than 380,000 objects and displays more than 35,000 works of art in eight curatorial departments: Egyptian Antiquities; Near Eastern Antiquities; Greek, Etruscan, and Roman Antiquities; Islamic Art; Sculpture; Decorative Arts; Paintings; and Prints and Drawings. The entire collection of objects spanning from the 6th millennium BC through to the 19th century AD is exhibited over an array of 60,000 square meters (or 645,000 square feet) divided onto four floors in three separate wings: Denon, Sully, and Richelieu.

By all accounts it is enormous!



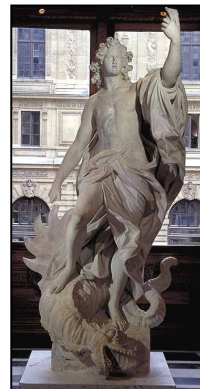
Although overwhelmed by the museum's sheer size, by the conclusion of our tour we had the immense privilege of observing a lot of great *objets d'art* both painted and sculpted. More surprising: the self-guided expedition turned into a completely unexpected stroll through my college-bound Humanities book. Room after room, floor upon floor, I found myself surrounded by the very pieces I had studied or previously read about. My

studies faltered at the time because I could claim no connection to the objects on the page, the lessons being taught, or what about ourselves their style of creation meant; here, surrounded by marble, oils or canvass, I began to covet a new-found understanding of the human condition I was introduced to, a new appreciation for a subject I thought nothing more than a waste of time. As I walked these hallowed halls and gazed upon the many works of art on display, I found the artistic enlightenment I had been looking for. The pleasure of comprehension beyond what we see at face value.

After all, isn't that why we journey to museums of art, science, and history?

I began this adventure on the Ground Floor of the Denon wing. In this room, referred to as Michelangelo's Gallery (Room 4), exists a wonderful array of marble and bronze sculptures, figures, busts and statues representing 16th to 19th century Italian workmanship. Many of the specimens on display here are famous in their own right, such as:

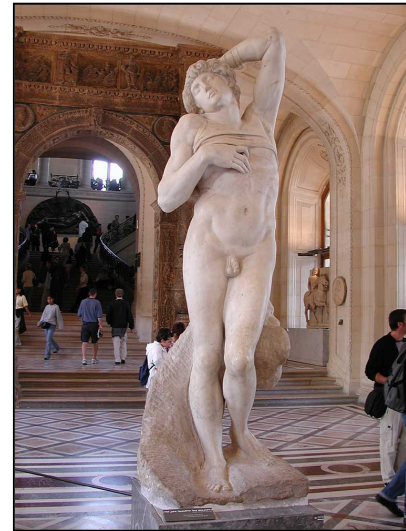
"Dircé" (Lorenzo BARTOLINI), "Psyche and Cupid" (Antonio CANOVA), "Antoine Triest" (François DUQUESNOY), "Flying Mercury" (GIAMBOLOGNA), "The Dying Slave" (MICHAELANGELO), "The Rebellious Slave" (MICHAELANGELO), "Apollo Triumphant over the Serpent Python" (unknown), and "Hercules Fighting the Hydra".





Probably the most significant pieces in this collection belong to the man whose gallery it is named: Michelangelo and his Slaves – “The Dying Slave” and “The Rebellious Slave”. The slaves were designed as part of a project to decorate the tomb of Pope Julius II, who once dreamed of a freestanding mausoleum at Saint Peter’s in Rome. Work began on the sculptures in 1513, but subsequent changes to the project and the untimely death of the Pope caused work to cease. Despite being unfinished, the two great marbles were already admired by artisans of the day; therefore, Michelangelo donated them to the Florentine exile Roberto Strozzi, who later presented them to the French king.

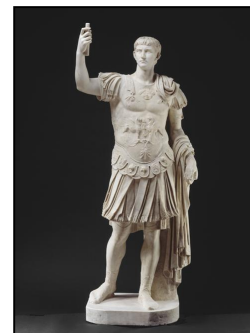
Researching shows the iconographical theme of the pair is something of a mystery. The two chained slaves express entirely different emotions. *The Dying Slave* is superbly young and handsome, and apparently in a deep (perhaps eternal) sleep whereas the other, called *The Rebellious Slave*, is a coarser figure whose whole body seems engaged in a violent struggle. Both embody the conflicting artistic tendencies at work during the age. The Dying Slave’s idealized traits – such as the perfectly proportioned figure, the restrained facial expression, and the body’s gentle S-curve shape are hallmarks of the High Renaissance style. But the figure’s overall sleekness and exaggerated arm movements are portents of Early Mannerism I found out.

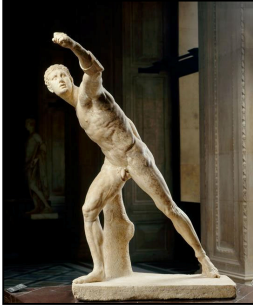


Still, what do these captive figures symbolize? The curators of the Louvre, as artisans the world over alike have no doubt, asked do these figures symbolize the subjugated provinces? Or the Arts, reduced to slavery by the pontiff’s death? Perhaps they have a role to play in his eternal triumph? Should they be interpreted as enslaved passions, or (in accordance with the Platonic theme which inspired Michelangelo) do they represent the human soul, burdened by the body? Although we will never know for sure, even in their unfinished form they’re still a marvelous sight to behold. And to be in the same room with them, to stand next to and realize that Michelangelo himself worked on these, is awe-inspiring.



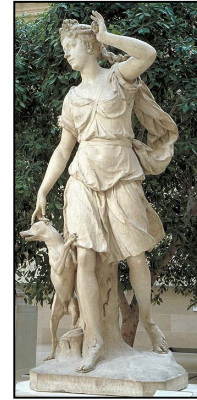
In the room next door, Room B of the Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities collection, magnificent Roman sculptures came to life, such as: the “Borghese Gladiator” (Agasias of Ephesos), “Statue with Armour / Agrippa Postumus” (unknown), and “The Emperor Trajan” (unknown).





Here, the “Borghese Gladiator” is the star. The piece has been praised as an aesthetic model of the male nude in motion since its discovery in the early seventeenth century. It has been endlessly copied, modeled and adapted by modern and contemporary artists since. The warrior as depicted defends himself energetically, thrusting his torso forward in a movement that is both defensive and self-protective. Behind his shield, he prepares to riposte, his face turned sharply towards his opponent. Superb.

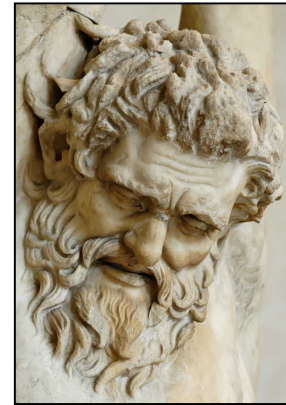
The Caryatides halls (Rooms 16 and 17) also contained a number of magnificent works from the Hellenistic period – an age that covers a relatively brief period of time from the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC to the triumph of Rome over Macedonian Greece in 146 BC. Four of these stood out: the colossal statue of “Melpomène”, “Diana of Versailles” (also known as “Artemis with a Doe” - Right), “The Flaying of Marsyas” and “The Three Graces”.



Melpomène (Μελπομένη), one of the nine muses of Greek mythology, dominates this area, standing 3.92 meters (12.86 feet) high. Originally known as the “Muse of Singing”, she later became associated as the “Muse of Tragedy” as she is oft represented holding a knife or other blunt object in one hand, and a tragic mask in the other. This specimen is devoid of the knife, but that doesn’t make her any less impressive. Her crown of cypress and the traditional cloak (or cothurnus) is present and she towers over all. I was immediately drawn. In Greek mythology, Melpomène is the daughter of Zeus and Mnemosyne. Siblings include: Calliope (Muse of Epic Poetry), Clio (Muse of History), Euterpe (Muse of Lyrical Poetry), Terpsichore (Muse of Dancing), Erato (Muse of Erotic Poetry), Thalia (Muse of Comedy), Polyhymnia (Muse of Hymns) and Urania (Muse of Astronomy). Consequently, the other eight muses.

“Diana of Versailles” is a unique piece. The goddess – Diana to the Romans, Artemis to the Greeks – was Apollo’s twin sister and a fierce hunter. As the goddess of chastity, and a tireless hunter, her arrows could punish the misdeeds of men without ever missing a mark. She is depicted here in action, with her tunic (the chiton) tucked up for ease and her cape (the himation) clinging closely to her form. Accompanying her is a deer. The work was a gift from Pope Paul IV to the French King Henri II and was one of the first ancient statues to arrive in France. Although this is a Roman Imperial Copy of an original Greek statue from the second Classical period of the fourth century BC, this particular piece can be dated to about first-second century AD.

The “Flaying of Marsyas” is a 2.56 meter (8.39 feet) high statue depicting the flaying of the satyr Marsyas, who dared to challenge Apollo to a music contest, and lost. Here he is shown hanging from the branch of a pine tree, awaiting his horrendous punishment. And lastly the “Three Graces” relief; called “Charities” in Greek, they were the goddesses of beauty and originally of vegetation. Together with the Muses, the three sisters spread joy and happiness as part of Apollo’s cortège.



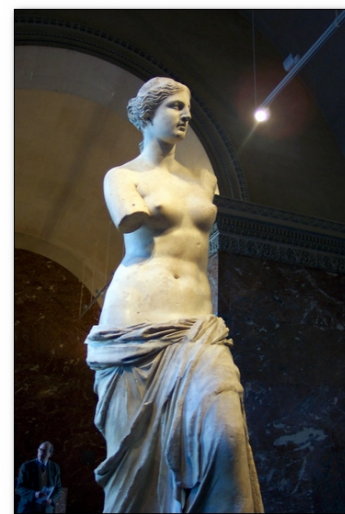
But the crown jewel here, further on in Room 12 – the statues of Aphrodite known as “The Venus de Milo” and “Venus of Arles”.



First, the “Venus of Arles” (left) is a 1.94 meter high sculpture of Aphrodite discovered in multiple pieces at the Roman Theater at Arles, a moderate-sized French city on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Although heavily modified over the years to appear as Venus, this statue never-the-less intrigues as it’s this pose that has been widely copied in later art and one that lent interpretation to the heralded “Venus de Milo” (bottom right). Standing over six-feet high, the “Venus de Milo” is a goddess shrouded in mystery. It is believed this interpretation of Venus was sculpted between 130 and 100 BC; since her discovery on the island of Melos in 1820 she has intrigued and fascinated scholars. Is it really Aphrodite, who was often portrayed half-naked, or the sea goddess Amphitrite, who was venerated on Milo? The missing pieces of marble and the absence of attributes (namely

her arms) have made restoration and identification difficult; however, she is fondly referred to as Aphrodite because of her half-nakedness and her sensual, feminine curves. Hellenistic tendencies abound; the head is executed in the pure Hellenic style, as seen in the serene countenance, the exquisitely detailed hair, and the finely chiseled features. Even her body with its frank sensuality and its coy draperies clearly define her as the epitome of graceful feminine beauty. And gazing upon her today as I did, I have no doubts to those claims.

After gazing upon Venus for a few more moments, our attentions turned to the Renaissance painters occupying the first floor of the Grand Gallerie. Waiting for us in the Escalier was one of the most celebrated peerless masterpieces of Greek sculpture – “Nike, the Winged Victory of Samothrace”.





Originally occupying a niche in an open-air theater at a temple complex dedicated to the Great Gods (Megalon Theon) on the island of Samothrace in the northwest Aegean, upon her re-discovery in 1884, she has since found herself dominating the Daru staircase at the Louvre. Nike of Samothrace – commonly referred to as the “Winged Victory” because Nike was the Greek goddess of victory – is a perfect symbol of the war-dominated Hellenistic age. Carved to appear to be striding into the wind, with wildly agitated draperies and soaring wings, this sculpture embodies exuberant action, a defining feature of this turbulent age in which the successors of Alexander fought amongst themselves (before succumbing to Rome). The theatrical stance, vigorous movement,

and billowing drapery is said to suggest a votive offering dedicated in commemoration to a great naval victory – perhaps, erected in honor of the Battle of Myonnisos or the Rhodian victory at Side in 190 BC against the fleet of Antiochus III of Syria (as denoted). Although part of a sculptural group on the island, which included a war gallery, a fountain, and a reflecting pool (now lost), the Nike still gives the impression of standing on the prow of a swiftly moving ship and an aura of power.

It was such a magnificent piece. It’s placement at the Louvre was pure brilliance.

Above, the Grand Gallerie was packed with an exquisite collection of paintings both pre and post renaissance from artists such as Antonello de Mesina, Giulio Pippi, Bernardino Luini, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Francesco Solimena, Jacques-Louis David and, yes, Leonardo Da Vinci. They all came to life in glorious color. Major notables include; From Antonello de Messina: “Christ at the Column” and “Portrait of a Man (The Condottiere)”. From Giulio Pippi: “The Circumcision”, “The Adoration of the Shepherds”, and “The Triumph of Titus and Vespasian”. From Bernardino Luini: “The Infant Jesus Sleeping” and “Menaggio Madonna”. From Domenico Ghirlandaio: “Old Man with Child”. From Francisco Solimena: “The Expulsion of Heliodorus from the Temple”. From Jacques-Louis David: “The Oath of Horatii” (upper-right) and “The Coronation of Napoleon and Josephine”. From Eugene Delacroix: “Liberty, Leading the People” and “The Death of Sardanopalus”. From Veronese: “The Wedding Feast at Cana” (lower-right). From Giuseppe Archimboldo: “Le Printemps (Spring)”.



And, from Leonardo Da Vinci: “Saint John the Baptist (Bacchus), “Virgin and Child with St. Anne”, “The Virgin of the Rocks” and the *Pièce de résistance*, “The Mona Lisa”.

An unbelievable array of priceless works on display here from many of the gifted masters of the Renaissance and beyond! But perhaps the most important – and the most exciting for us – the “Mona Lisa”, Leonardo da Vinci’s most celebrated work.

Considered one of the “big three” pieces here (“Nike of Samothrace” and “Venus de Milo” being the other two, although many arguments must abound in disagreement), the “Mona Lisa” is one of the most important pieces we wanted to see today. And queuing up to catch just a glimpse of this famous portrait gave me chills beyond belief. As I stood in line, jostling to keep from losing my position, I wondered: what exactly draws us to this particular portrait? Is it the sitter’s famous smirk? Is it the portrait’s realistic scale and highly structured space? Is it only because master artist Leonardo da Vinci created it? Or is it because we don’t know that much about the portrait after all? Otherwise, although a gem to look at, it’s much smaller than first expected.



The history of the Mona Lisa is indeed shrouded in mystery.

Among the aspects which remain unclear is the exact identity of the sitter, who commissioned the portrait, how long Leonardo worked on the painting, how long he kept it, and how it came to be in the French royal collection. She is thought to be Lisa Gherardini, wife of a middle-class Florentine cloth merchant named Francesco del Giocondo but otherwise identification ends with mere speculation. Regardless of the reasons for painting her, Leonardo treats his middle-class subject as a model court lady, imbuing her presence with calm seriousness and quiet dignity. Her clothing is unremarkable. Neither the yellow sleeves of her gown, nor the pleated gown itself, nor the scarf delicately draped round her shoulders are signs of aristocratic status. Leonardo hints at the sitters’ demure nature through her shy smile and the charmingly awkward gesture of having the fingers of her right hand caress her left arm.

Regardless of the answer of the portrait’s identity, to lay eyes on such a marvelous painting at the hand of one of the Renaissance’s masters provokes words I cannot express and it truly hardened within me the need to take further studies in humanities, arts, and history very, very seriously. After all it is this portrait that was soon regarded as the prototype of all those created during the Renaissance.

Whoop! It’s my turn in the shower. I’ll be right back!

Expedition: Europe

Paris, FR



“Avenue des Champs-Élysées”

MONDAY, JANUARY 27th - PART 2

There, all clean. It's quite refreshing too I might add, although the shower here is a little odd. There's no tub! It's just a curtained off portion of the bathroom with a drain in the floor and a spigot overhead. It truly is quite weird...

Anyway, where were we? Oh, that's right...

Tuileries et Galleria du Carrousel



Our time at the Louvre ended there; we exited the gallery through the *Portes des Lions* doors and out into the museum's beautiful gardens. From here the grand Pyramid came into focus and we caught our first glimpse of the buildings that made up the magnificent museum.

Although it should come as no surprise that this ornate structure was once a palace (known as the *Palais du Louvre*), it may surprise you (as it did me) to

know that these buildings got their start as a fortress, constructed by King Philippe-Auguste in 1190 to protect the city against hordes of Viking raiders. Remnants of this fortress are still visible and can be toured via excavation in the Sully Wing, which we did not today.

Four centuries of French Kings and emperors improved and enlarged the Louvre, radically changing its structure after Philippe-Auguste. Charles V transformed the fortress into a royal residence in 1360. Later, King Francois I demolished the Louvre's keep and replaced the entire structure with the Renaissance-style building we see today. By 1674, Louis XIV abandoned the Palace for one in Versailles, leaving the Louvre a place to display the royal collection. And during the French Revolution, the National Assembly decreed that the Louvre should be used as a museum to display the nation's masterpieces, rather than royal ones, which opened to the public on August 10, 1793.

The pyramid (known as the *Pyramide du Louvre*) then is a much later addition, constructed entirely of glass in 1989. By the numbers it reaches a height of 20.6 meters (70 feet), its square base has sides of 35 meters (115 feet), and it consists of 603 rhombus-shaped and 70 triangular-shaped glass segments. Although told its construction was fiercely opposed by the traditionalists as being quite out of place, the juxtaposition of the contrasting architectural styles – the classical (the Louvre) with the ultra-modern (the pyramid) – is quite enjoyable. There's just something about a pyramid...



On the opposite shores of this rotunda, stands the Arc du Carrousel, a spectacular arch of ornate marble. Napoleon erected the *Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel* (as it is more formally referred) in 1808 as an entrance to the former *Palais des Tuileries*, though he had a more sinister motive – it was commissioned to commemorate his most recent military victories against the Third Coalition.



Modeled after the Arch of Constantine standing in Rome, the monument rises 19 meters (63 feet) high, stands 23 meters (75 feet) wide, and is 7.3 meters (24 feet) deep. The 6.4 meter (21 feet) high central arch is flanked by two smaller ones, 4.3 meters (14 feet) high each. Around the exterior are eight Corinthian-style columns of granite topped by soldiers of his Grande Armée. The Grande Armée replaced the Horses of St. Mark's, which Napoleon stole from *Basilica Cattedrale*

Patriachale di San Marco (Saint Mark's Basilica) in Venice – the impetus for the arch's construction. The horses were returned to Italy in 1815 after Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo (although, ironically enough, this would not be the first time the horses were looted then later returned).

Further inspection shows a number of bas-reliefs between the soldiers, illustrating the Arms of the Kingdom of Italy with figures representing History and the Arts; the Arms of the French Empire with Victory, Fame, History and Abundance; and Wisdom and Strength, accompanied by Prudence and Victory.

Napoleon's victories against the Third Coalition are also commemorated with bas-reliefs made out of rose marble. Formed by Britain, the Austrian Empire, Sweden and the Russian Empire (among others) with the objective of overthrowing the French Empire

(the cause of instability on the continent), Napoleon dispatched with the armies of the Third Coalition with great ease. The Surrender of Ulm (a battle that France won to suppress Austria), The Battle of Austerlitz (a historic decisive battle the French won against Britain, Austria and Russia), the Peace of Pressburg (the treaty that came from the Austerlitz battle, effectively ending the Holy Roman Empire and setting up a buffer zone between France and the rest of Europe), Napoleon entering Munich, Napoleon entering Vienna, and the Tilsit Conferences all commemorated.

Saviez-vous Que?

Do you know how *Jardin des Tuileries* got its name? The name is derived from the factories that once dotted this area. They produced tiles, or roof tiles, fired in kilns called “tuileries”.

Adjacent to the Arc du Carrousel lies the *Jardin des Tuileries*, formal gardens which once belonged to the old *Palais des Tuileries*, burned to the ground in 1871 during the upheaval surrounding the suppression of the Paris Commune (a form of government during this era whereby the working-class people held power). The gardens, laid out by André Le Nôtre, royal gardener to Louis XIV, in 1664 are all that remains. Today the

gardens cover about 63 acres (25 hectares) of space and include reflecting pools, shade trees, gravel pathways, and, of course, many benches. It’s reportedly the place to be seen in Paris and we were seen. Although we didn’t have too much time to sit and partake in a bench and use this excellent locale to people watch, Maya did take up an offer to be sketched by a couple of street artists as we strolled along.

Place de la Concorde

Part through the trees – unfortunately bare this time of year – and the central dirt pathway ambling through the *Tuileries* much like the River Seine meanders through the city, and you’ll no doubt come upon the *Place de la Concorde*, the largest square in all of Paris.

History abounds here perhaps like nowhere else in the city. In less auspicious times, this area was known as the “Place de la Révolution”, a name it earned well. It was here the Paris Commune, the local-government formed out of the ashes of the absolute monarchy that had ruled France up to that point, erected a guillotine in the square for the intent purpose of showcasing bloody public beheadings. During what has become known as “The Reign of Terror” – a year-long period of violence occurring just after the onset of the French Revolution in 1793 – over 1,000 citizens were put to a horrible death. All convicted of treason or in duplicity with the crown. The first notable execution was King Louis XVI on January 21, 1793 and a number of high-profile deaths followed, including those of Queen Marie Antoinette, Princess Elisabeth, Philippe Égalité (Louis Philippe II, Duke of Orléans), and Antoine Lavoisier.

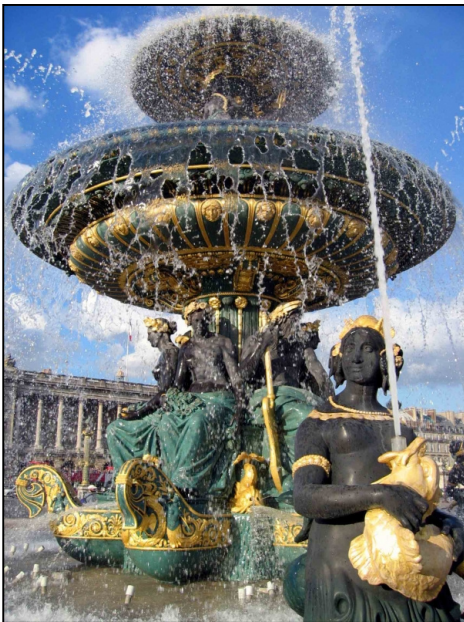
Saviez-vous Que?

Did you know that Antoine Lavoisier is known as the “father of modern chemistry”? He stated the first law of conservation of mass, recognized and named Oxygen and Hydrogen, helped construct the metric system, wrote the first extensive list of elements and reformed chemical nomenclature. Wow!

Today the square is ripe with hope and beauty.

Upon each angle of the square's unique octagon shape are erected a series of statues created by Jacques-Ignace Hittorff (leading city architect at the time), representing eight important French cities of the day: Lille, Strasbourg, Lyon, Marseille, Bordeaux, Nantes, Brest and Rouen. At the center you'll find an occupation by the *Obélisque de Louxor*, a genuine obelisk of Egyptian descent decorated with hieroglyphics exalting the reign of the pharaoh Ramses II. Flanked on either side of the needle, two beautiful fountains (known as the *Fontaines de la Concorde*) stand, one representing the maritime spirit of France, and the other the river and its harvests.

As one who is keen on fountains, I found both to be exquisitely crafted and ornamented specimens. Both are of virtually identical construction: Six bronze figures representing sea gods (tritons), sea nymphs (nereids) or water nymphs (naiads) occupy the basin, holding onto fish spouting water up into the rim of the vasque above. Six semi-nude allegorical figures representing the industries of either the sea or the river are seated on the prow of a ship (a symbol of the City of Paris) and support the large circular vasque and its pedestal. The figures are joined by Dolphins as they splash about, spraying water out through their noses. Above the vasque, supporting the mushroom-shaped cap, are four figures of different forms of genius in arts or crafts. Water shoots skyward over their heads and cascades over the lower vasque. Swans join their ranks, spurting water into the fountain's basin below.



The south fountain, known as the Maritime Fountain (or *La Fontaine des Mers*), contains figures representing the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea, of harvesting coral and fish, of collecting shellfish and pearls, and the geniuses of astronomy, navigation and commerce. The north fountain, known as the Fountain of the Rivers (or *La Fontaine des Fleuves*), contains figures representing the Rhône and Rhine rivers, the main harvests of France, of wheat and grapes, of flowers and fruit, and the geniuses of river navigation, industry and agriculture.

And for all their glory, they are not the main attraction.

Saviez-vous Que?

Did you know the obelisk's gold cap is not original? The original, believed stolen in the 6th century BC, was replaced by a gold-leafed replicate in 1998.

At the center of it all is the great obelisk. It is one of two the Egyptian government bequeathed to the French in the 1800s from the Luxor Temple in Thebes. It is magnificent

– especially in the warm light of sunset. The giant red granite column standing sentinel rises an imposing 23 meters (75 feet) above the plaza, and weighs an impressive 250 metric tons. The pedestal on which the needle is seated contains diagrams in hieroglyphic style explaining the machinery that was used in its transportation to Paris from Thebes (which was no easy task given the technical limitations of the day). Consequently, it proved to be such a hardship to transport that the second obelisk still stands at the Luxor Temple. The French Government returned it to the Egyptians in the 1990s as a symbolic gesture of friendship.

Today, of course, it acts as a beacon for all Parisians.



The Arc de Triomphe

Last, but certainly not least, we finally approached upon the *Arc de Triomphe* standing triumphantly at the end of the *Champs-Élysées*.



What started out as nothing more than fields and market gardens, has become the most well known 2 kilometer (1.25 mile) stretch of roadway in all of Europe – perhaps, even, the entire world. It is known in France as *La plus belle avenue du monde*, or “the most beautiful avenue in the world”, as such it is also one of the most well known shopping districts in Europe with high-class goods for purchase up and down its tree-lined thoroughfare. You’ll find

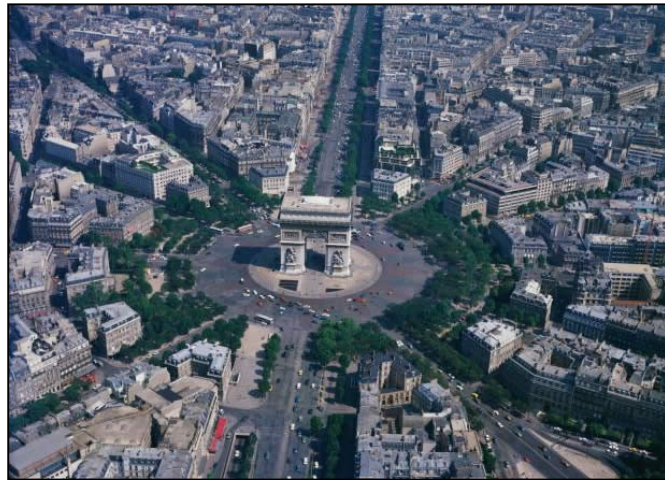
a plethora of local and chain brand goods on site, but do come with a full purse and intent on parting with most of your earnings. With rents reportedly as high as €1 million per 1,000 square feet there is nothing along the *Champs-Élysées* that can be defined as “affordable”.

That includes your run-of-the-mill music store.

As my travel mates can attest, I have no penchant for shopping, yet neither Cedric, Maya nor I could resist a peek into the Virgin Megastore on the *Champs-Élysées* – and weren't we in for quite a shock? Floor after floor after floor of the most amazing assortments of CDs and other multimedia greeted us at every turn, far surpassing the catalogue available at Piccadilly, or even the store I'm used to shopping in at Downtown Disney West Side. Even the décor was something to behold; the kind you'd see reserved for museums, palaces or grand halls. Patrons are not treated to plain concrete or wood – the floors and staircases here are made of solid marble, the carpets most decidedly plush and the railings brass or better. Classical artwork even adorned these walls, usually reserved for more contemporary fare – new release posters and the like.

It was almost unfathomable. From the moment we entered through the front doors we thought we had been transported to a strange, new land – a full land where even the most mundane came with all the trappings of riches. The *Champs-Élysées* is named after the “Elysian Fields” of Greek mythology (the place where the blessed dead go in the afterlife), after all; perhaps we had. For audiophiles around the globe, an argument could be had that stepping into this Megastore may just indeed be your Elysian Field! But as exciting as the Megastore was, it was not nearly as striking as the *Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile* and the *Place Charles de Gaulle* where it stands.

Historically known as the *Place de l'Étoile*, the *Place Charles de Gaulle* is the real attraction. It is the central meeting point (or starting point depending upon how one reflects upon it) of no less than twelve trafficked avenues which come to a head with the *Arc de Triomphe* at its center. The plaza became associated with General (and later President) de Gaulle following his death, but it is still generally known by its original (and more fitting) name: “Place of the Star”. And it is an amazing place to stand let me assure you. Besides the roadway junction, and the host of the *Arc de Triomphe*, Place Charles de Gaulle is also home to France's *La Tombe du Soldat Inconnu* (or Tomb of the Unknown Soldier), interred on Armistice Day 1920. An eternal flame and inscription honors the unknown dead from World War I: ICI REPOSE UN SOLDAT FRANÇAIS MORT POUR LA PATRIE 1914–1918 (“Here lies a French soldier who died for the fatherland 1914–1918”).



The *Arc de Triomphe* pre-dates World War I by more than 100 years to the reign of Napoleon I who, in 1806, decreed that such an arch be built to the glory of the Grand Armée of France. As the arch was to dominate Paris and indulge the Emperor's taste for all things Roman, the architects took their inspiration from the Arch of Titus in Rome, constructing a colossus to extraordinary dimensions: the monument stands 50 meters (160 feet) high, 45 meters (150 feet) wide, and 22 meters (72 feet) deep.



Its shape is simple, composed of a single east-west arch in line with the Champs-Élysées. A lower north-south transverse arch opens on either side. There are two open-air vaults within: the large vault is 29.19 meters (95.8 feet) high and 14.62 meters (48 feet) wide, and the smaller vault, measuring 18.68 meters (61.3 feet) high and 8.44 meters (27.7 feet) wide. The Arch is truly magnificent. It is the second largest triumphal arch in existence today and weighs some 100,000 tonnes.

But what struck me wasn't its imposing form per se, but how well ornamented the arch appeared.

On the piers (eleven meters high) above the cornices, six bas-reliefs recount famous episodes from the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. A two-meter high continuous frieze of characters runs around the level of the entablature, which depicts the departure of the armies, the great figures of the revolution and the Empire, the cavalymen and the grenadiers of the artillery, the hussars and sappers of the artillery, and finally the return of the armies from Egypt and Italy. The pillars too are highly decorated.



Beginning with the *Champs-Élysées* side, on the right-hand pillar, we have "The Departure of Volunteers" (commonly called "Marseillaise") representing the Spirit of Liberty urging the people to fight and defend their territory. Above it is the "Battle of Aboukir", which took place in 1799 during the campaign against the Turks led by Napoleon in Egypt. The left-hand pillar is devoted to "The Triumph of Napoleon", depicted as an emperor crowned with laurels. Above is the relief of "General Marceau's Funeral", which shows Austrian officers gathering before the mortal remains of the hero of the Revolution. On the narrow side, facing Avenue Kléber, "The Battle of Jemmapes" depicts the 1792 conflict between the Revolution army and the Austrian Army. The "Spirit of the Future" can also be found nearby, dictating his duty to a naked warrior: defend the fatherland.

On the Avenue de la Grande-Armée side, on the right-hand pillar, we have “The Resistance” relief depicting a nation repelling the invasion of foreign forces allied against Napoleon in 1814 (the Fourth Coalition). Above, “The Passage of the Bridge of Arcola” shows Bonaparte brandishing the tricolor flag. On the left-hand pillar, we have “Peace”, which shows the basic activities of society reborn, such as agriculture, family and education. Above, a bas-relief depicting the “Capture of Alexandria” by General Kléber in 1798 and on the narrow side, facing Avenue Wagram, the “Battle of Austerlitz” is illustrated (in more detail than on the Arc du Carrousel).

Shields bearing the names of battles adorn the attic storey and one will find “The Renowned” pieces perched in the spandrels of the small arches. They are sculptures of men whose attributes evoke the various army corps which existed in the 19th century: the cavalry, the marine infantry and the artillery.

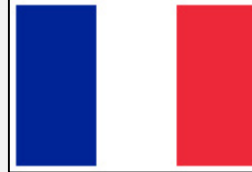
Although the Arc commemorates a number of important episodes from France’s past, it has seen its fair share of infamous episodes as well. It’s hard to stand here and not think about the stirring video of hundreds of thousands of Parisians (most in tears) lining these streets to greet German soldiers as they paraded through following the Fall of France on June 14, 1940. I have to wonder what thoughts they dwelled upon (beyond the obvious) seeing Hitler and his men waltz through their homeland in celebration. It must have been the most awful feeling. Still, it’s better to think about Parisians cheering in relief when the Allies marched through here four years later liberating the city from the Nazi Third Reich. For the French, and Parisians, were lucky their city was considered a prize or jewel and to have escaped mostly unscathed.

With the outside thoroughly covered, we turned our attentions inward.

Inside lies about 284 steps that will take you to the top of the Arch for a magnificent panoramic view of the city. And let me say it is simply breathtaking – not to be missed! The star pattern surrounding the Arc is much easier to see from here as well. Rotating clockwise from the *Champs-Élysées*, we have Avenue Marceau, Avenue d’Iéna, Avenue Kléber, Avenue Victor Hugo, Avenue Foch, Avenue de la Grande-Armée, Avenue Carnot, Avenue Mac-Mahon, Avenue de Wagram, Avenue Foch (also known as *Avenue du Bois de Boulogne*), and Avenue de Friedland. And it’s much easier to get an understanding of what the Parisians refer to as *L’Axe Historique* from this elevated height – you can see it end to end!

Saviez-vous Que?

Did you know the French flag is referred to as the “Tricolore”? Consisting of blue, white and red (in that order from left-to-right), it is a melding of the traditional flag of Paris (Red/Blue) with the naval ensign of the Kingdom of France.



The vertical tri-color flag was adopted as the official flag of France in 1790 and each color represents a realm of the ancient regime: white for the clergy, red for the nobility and blue for the bourgeoisie.

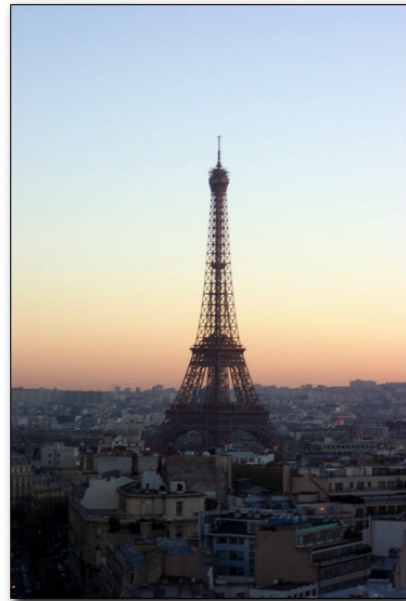


L'Axe Historique, or the Historical Axis, is an unbroken line of monuments that extends from the *Musée du Louvre* in the center of Paris to *L'Arche de la Défense* in the west, creating a precise axis across the city approximately 9 kilometers long. Historically speaking, however, the original Axis ended here at the *Arc de Triomphe* and with all there is to see and do between the points it's no wonder the Parisians also refer to the path as the *Voie Triomphale*, or the Triumphant Way.

Thankfully Hitler never got a second chance to make his way down the *Champs-Élysées*, but for us it truly was a triumphal way, touching all the various places we visited today: the *Pyramide du Louvre*, the *Place du Carrousel*, the *Jardins des Tuileries*, the *Place de la Concorde*, the *Obélisque de Louxor*, the *Champs-Élysées* and, of course, the *Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile*.

We celebrated the conclusion of our day's journey with non-alcoholic drinks at a nearby street café, finally able to take that rest we so dearly needed today before calling it a day.

Our tummies are now full (we ate back down at the restaurant we found last night), our feet are up (let's not get started on that topic), and our pajamas are on (ahhhhh). What more could you ask for? Tomorrow is the first of possibly two days down at Disneyland Paris – I'm so excited! Finally, after years of waiting and hoping, I'll get to see this Disney Resort first hand. It should be fun!





“Plan du Parc: Disneyland Paris”

TUESDAY, JANUARY 28TH

“Madames et monsieurs, et vous les enfants! Disneyland Paris est fier de vous présenter son extraordinaire festival de magie nocturne et d'enchantement, dans une féerie de milliers de lumières, sur une musique electro-synthe-magnetique: the Main Street Electrical Parade!”

You know you want to...

There's no removing “Baroque Hoedown”, the opening theme to Disney's most famous spectacular festival pageant of nighttime magic and imagination, from my head now. I'm too flushed with excitement and nostalgia from seeing its thousands of sparkling lights and hearing the electro-synthe-magnetic musical sounds to try and curb it. I'm quite sure I'm annoying someone by humming the theme over and over but I can't help it.



Of all the parades and night-time spectacles I've seen at Walt Disney World, the Main Street Electrical Parade is the most dear to my heart (even beating out “Illuminations 2000: Reflections of Earth”, “Tapestry of Nations” and “Fantasmic”, which is saying something). Watching the Electrical Parade once again take its journey down Main Street USA was the perfect finale on this spectacular magical evening.

Hum it with me!



We're on board RER Line-A now, preparing to make our way back from Marne-la-Vallée, a small town in the eastern suburbs of Paris some 32 kilometers (20 miles) from the center of the city, where our day has been spent exploring the wonders and joys of Disneyland Paris. As soon as everyone gets onboard we'll be pulling out but until then I can't wait to tell you about Disneyland Paris.

* * *

The Resort, more formally known as Disneyland Resort Paris, opened to the public on April 12, 1992 and although today it enjoys high attendance and popularity, I wish I could say the same at its debut. When the resort first opened it was considered a very costly flop. Attendance records and thoughts about the resort were quite sour (it must be a French thing) but after a name change (from Euro Disney to what you see today) and a few additions, the resort picked up steam. Today it enjoys a wide range of successes and is considered one of the best tourist destinations in all of Europe, drawing more visitors than the Louvre and Eiffel Tower per year combined, if you can believe that.



And there's plenty of room to grow. The Resort sprawls across a 5,000 acre site and as such there are a number of paths to take once you disembark from the train: to two theme parks (Disneyland Park and Walt Disney Studios Paris); seven hotels (Hotel Santa Fe, a basic themed resort; Hotel Cheyenne, a wild-west themed resort; Sequoia Lodge, a lake-side 'hunters lodge' type themed resort; Newport Bay Club, a nautically themed resort;

Hotel New York, a business-themed resort; the Davey Crockett Ranch, a woodlands themed resort complete with log cabins; and the Disneyland Hotel, the crown jewel Victorian-age themed resort); a shopping, dining and entertainment district (the Disney Village); an ice-skating rink; a few lakes; two convention centers; and a golf course. That's quite a bit to see and do.

There are a number of paths to take once you disembark from the train; our purpose today lied with Disneyland Park, the resorts signature destination. Although Disneyland Paris is a virtual carbon-copy of Disneyland in Anaheim (California), the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World (in Florida) and Tokyo Disneyland (in Japan), there are a number of, shall I say, French flairs. It is the largest Disneyland Park based on the original concept – it occupies over 140 acres of land – and it's one of the most beautifully themed we've ever seen. You'll find most of the familiar themed lands here – Main Street USA, Frontierland, Fantasyland, and Discoveryland – with its signature attractions largely intact.



The entrance to Disneyland Paris is cast through a meandering garden pathway known as Fantasia Gardens, replete with grassy knolls, statuary-featured nooks, fountain-filled ponds, tree-covered gazebos, and lamp-lit benches from which to sit and absorb the surroundings. Further in lies the floral mosaic likeness of Mickey Mouse featured at all Disneyland parks and a magnificent multi-storey hotel adorned with the park's namesake. And from the moment we turned through the styles under the glorious Victorian façade of Disneyland Hotel, whose ground floor serves as the entrance to the park, we had to revise everything we ever knew about a Disneyland park.

Main Street USA, which represents turn-of-the-century small-town America, right down to the horse-drawn rail cars, paddy wagons, jitneys and storefronts, charmed us beyond belief. First, lined with cobblestones, and centered round-about a bandstand gazebo, is Town Square. The Victorian façades here offer a wealth of detail unforeseen at other parks, and hide several interesting stores. You'll find familiar structures such as the Disneyland Train Depot, City Hall, the Transportation Company and Emporium, but you'll also find a few differences too: there is no fire station (a book store stands in its place), but there is a boarding house, a bicycle shop (Kittyhawk's) and a petrol station (Main Street Motors).



Further along, you can snack at Casey's Corner, succumb to the aromas from Cookie Kitchen, get a haircut at Dapper Dan's, or if you're in the mood for a sandwich try Market House Delicatessen; all familiar to frequent Disneyland visitors. But if you're looking for a real treat, mosey down one of Main Street's arcades, a European-style feature you won't find at any other Disneyland Park. They're Discovery Arcade and Liberty Arcade and you'll find they parallel either side of Main Street offering up their own unique experiences.

Saviez-vous Que?

Did you know when Disneyland Paris opened, the cast of Tokyo Disneyland sent their congratulations? You can find this in the form of a plaque inside the lobby of City Hall. "Congratulations" is written in three languages: English, Japanese and, of course, French.

Not only will you find back-door access into the various shops along Main Street, but, in the case of Liberty Arcade, a tribute to the Statue of Liberty – a gift from the French don't ya know. The arcades are truly a unique addition to Main Street USA.

And with Sleeping Beauty's Castle, re-imagined for Disneyland Paris, thrusting skyward at the end of Main Street (which I'll elude to more later on) – you've gotten the perfect introduction to Disneyland park as a whole. Beautifully detailed, generously ornamented, elaborately themed and consisting of a charm unmatched at the Magic Kingdom; we loathed leaving Main Street.



The Native American encampment, a babbling brook and a canopy of trees announce you have stepped off of Main Street and deep into the American wilderness. Pass under the lookout and through the gates of Fort Comstock and enter **Frontierland**, one of the most unique western-themed lands at any Disneyland-based park. The land has earned this distinction because it is the largest of all its brethren world-wide and occupies the space traditionally reserved for Adventureland. Besides its seamless transition between the wild-wild west, a pueblo-esque town and the sparse lands of a backcountry, Frontierland Paris has one more attribute to set it apart from the rest: it has an elaborate back-story to tie it with its surroundings rather than a hodge-podge of western-like, Davey Crocket-ish generalizations found at the various other Disneyland parks.

Here you're in the town of Thunder Mesa, founded by Henry Ravenswood to support the mining of nearby Big Thunder Mountain. As such all the attractions in the land support or gain their foundation by the elaborate mining story. The Lucky Nugget Saloon, for example, was built with the windfall from finding a gold nugget the size of a loaf of bread on Big Thunder Mountain. J. Nutterville's does coffins and cabinets. Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, then, is the "run-away" mine train from those efforts (which is also different from others in that it's situated on an island). You'll also find the Thunder Mesa Riverboats here (a cruise through the open air landscape on luxurious paddle wheel boats), a shooting range (Rustler Roundup's), the Keelboats, and Pocahontas' Indian Village (a play area for children). Even Phantom Manor, Disneyland Paris's version of the Haunted Mansion, supports the mining town story – and it's one of the brightest spots in the park thematically.





Among the first settlers to strike it rich during the town's Gold Rush heyday, Henry and Martha Ravenswood built the best house in town, an elegant Victorian manor high upon a hill overlooking the Rivers of the Far West. There the pair raised a beautiful daughter named Melanie. As his only child, Ravenswood became very possessive of her. When Melanie fell in love and her lover proposed, Ravenswood became furious

and swore to stop the wedding at all costs. But before he could enact his devious plan, a devastating earthquake rocked the town, killing both he and his wife. Seems Ravenswood infuriated Thunder Mountain's thunderbird protector whose spirit was angry over the continued plundering of the mountain's riches. Melanie, however, was spared.

When the day came for her to wed, her fiancée never appeared leaving her to sit alone in the ballroom, waiting. "Someday," she told herself, "he will come." And so, having never taken off her wedding dress or dropped her bouquet, she wandered about the house aimlessly for years and years, singing melancholy songs of lost love, waiting for her suitor to come. Melanie's heart broke and she isolated herself from the townsfolk and those around her, never to be seen again.

Did Henry manage to prevent the fiancé from arriving, even from beyond his grave? No one knows for sure. But legend tells of a mysterious phantom unknown to anyone appearing on Melanie's wedding day. And while the bride was prepping in her room, the phantom lured her suitor up to the attic, whereby he hung him from the rafters! People say Melanie never left the mansion, or passed on, but some claim they have seen a woman in a wedding dress behind the windows of the mansion late at night. Unable to say for certain, and scared to investigate further, the townspeople shunned Ravenswood Mansion and began to refer to it as the Phantom Manor.



And that's just the setup for the ride. As fans of the Haunted Mansion, the three of us were salivating. We couldn't wait to ride it.



Since the Phantom Manor is an obvious cousin of the Haunted Mansion, a number of similarities abound, such as the Stretching Room, the Endless Hallway, the Music Room (the self-playing piano), the Corridor of Doors, the Clock Hall (where the grandfather clock always tolls the hour of “13”), the Séance Circle (where Madam Leota chants ancient incantations from surrounding tarot cards), and the famous Ballroom scene (where the ghosts dance).

Discussing these scenes beyond their notable technological upgrades, their wonderful redresses for design and changes for the storyline are moot, though remarkable.

But there are many differences as well. Throughout the ride we see much more of “the Phantom” and “the bride” throughout, as their sordid story is told in vignettes worked into more familiar set pieces. The Graveyard scene that follows “The Attic” here is also fundamentally different. Whereas other mansion’s graveyards are home to the “Grim Grinning Ghosts”, the Phantom Manor replaces them with more sinister scenes: we find the Phantom leaning wearily on his shovel beside a freshly dug grave. Tipped suddenly backwards, we descend into that grave and enter a subterranean tunnel of root-invested caverns filled with bones and coffins.



The Phantom’s hideous laughter heralds a change of scene as our Doom Buggy winded its way out of the catacombs and into the Old West ghost town of Phantom Canyon. A welcoming committee of a rotund spirit mayor and his raven companion are on hand. In a friendly gesture, the mayor tips not only his top hat but his head as well (“Ahhh, there you are...”). As we roll toward the Central Street, we pass the assay office and pharmacy. Smoke and an eerie glow come

from another crevice as storm clouds drift over the peaks of Big Thunder Mountain, transforming into ghost riders across a twilight sky. As we press on we find ourselves caught in the ghostly crossfire between a bandit and a lawman. Further on, a mild-mannered pharmacist is seen drinking one of his own concoctions, only to slowly turn into a grotesque image of his former self. And at the end of the main street of this ghost town, lies an earthquake-stricken saloon where four invisible gamblers play a lively hand of poker. Then finally, the Phantom puts in another appearance, making one last effort to entice us to take up residence here: he gestures towards an open coffin.

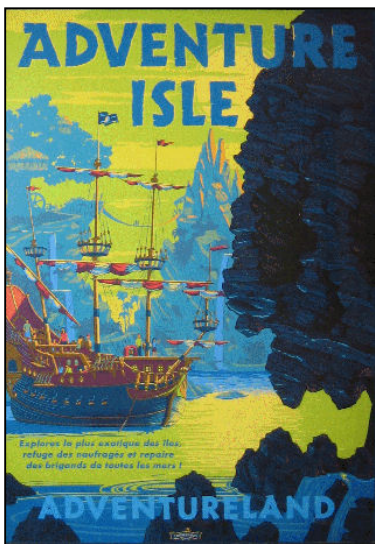
The “doombuggy” returns to Phantom Manor Garden with the mansion visible off in the distance atop a rocky pinnacle. Moving past a vortex of whirling light, the Bride reappears, floating in skeletal form clad in tattered bridal attire. She points us toward a possible escape route. Following her lead, we descend into yet another danger filled passage, moving past mirror-lined walls – suddenly the menacing outstretched arms of the



Phantom reach over to us from behind! Watch out! But with a flash of light, the Phantom disappears and we find ourselves in the wine cellar, back in the real world. As a sinister Manor host helps us disembark, the Bride makes a farewell appearance, eerie, yet horrifyingly real: “Hurry Baaaaack, hurry baaaaack!”

Whew, I think it’s time for Adventureland!

Like its brethren around the world, **Adventureland** Paris is a collection of far-off exotic lands featuring romanticized adaptations of the Middle East (Agrabah), the West Indies (Caribbean), Africa (the Pridelands), and Southeast Asia. As such you’ll find many timeless attractions within: Pirates of the Caribbean, Skull Rock & Adventure Isle (an adventure area featuring haunted passageways, Captain Hook’s pirate ship, lookout towers and hidden galleries), Indiana Jones et le Temple du Péril (an amazingly themed compact steel roller coaster around an abandoned Cambodian temple, which you ride backwards!), La Cabane des Robinson (The Swiss Family Robinson Treehouse), and Le Passage Enchanté d’Aladdin (Aladdin’s Secret Passage, tracing the story of Disney’s Aladdin in a beautiful detailed and well-themed walk-through attraction in storybook form).



Although quite impressed with Thunder Mountain (and naturally the Phantom Manor), we were equally impressed with Skull Rock & Adventure Isle and Paris’ version of Pirates of the Caribbean – another favorite of ours.

“Indiana Jones et le Temple du Péril” on the other hand turned out not to be a favorite of ours – its rough ride and lack of any kind of head support did me in. Sure, the theme of the queue and the coaster itself was quite detailed – I really bought the impression we were entering the base camp of a lost Cambodian temple – the physics of the ride made the effort totally unpleasant. My head snapped back and forth so many times I lost count – and it hurt! Otherwise, the coaster was quite fun but I can’t say I’ll do it again even knowing what to expect from it. But you just never know...



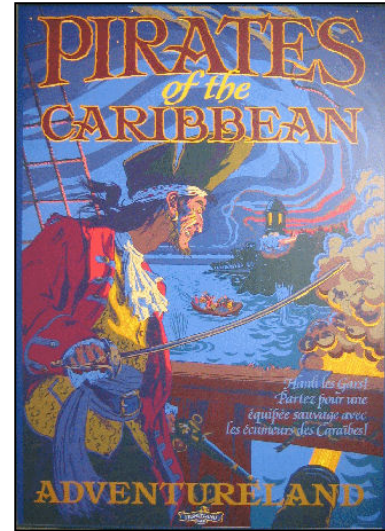
At Adventure Isle we became hearty buccaneers, and all thoughts of concussions were replaced with peg legs, eye patches and treasure hunting. *Arrrrrr!* Much like Tom Sawyer's Island at other Disneyland parks, Paris features an "island" of exploration as well. But rather than celebrate the characters from Mark Twain's "Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn", here pirates and castaways are fashionable. You'll find references

to "Treasure Island", "Peter Pan" and the Swiss Family Robinsons on the island in a number of well thought out and detailed caves all available to explore at your hearts leisure, such as "Le Ventre de la Terre" & Ben Gunn's Cave. The island is also home to the Robinson Tree-house & Boat, Captain Hook's Pirate Ship, the lookout known as Spyglass Hill and Skull Rock, a malevolent looking structure that has an uncanny resemblance to a human skull. Can you imagine us running around this area like kids? Believe it; we did! The caves were a blast (and highly intertwining and detailed), the Robinson Treehouse was also interesting, but Skull Rock was by far the coolest feature of the island. Not only did it look cool, but afforded wonderful views of the park and of Pirates of the Caribbean ride next door from within.



Speaking of which, Paris's version of Pirates of the Caribbean has to be one of the best adaptations of the original attraction of all Disneyland-based parks. No expense was spared in the re-creation of this classic attraction – from the highly detailed approach and queue to the advanced audio-animatronics installed within. It literally blew us away.

The setting for Pirates is an active, though battle-scarred, fortress of Spanish Colonial decent stationed somewhere in the Caribbean island chain. Duck under the mast of an old sailing ship and proceed along the citadel's stone pathway, shaded by palm trees and outstretched canvas sails, until you reach the gates. Pass through and enter the Blue Lagoon, one of Disney's finest themed indoor restaurants. Your "dingy" is docked here; board her and at once you're set off on one of the finest examples of a flumed dark ride to come out of Disney Imagineering in quite a long time.

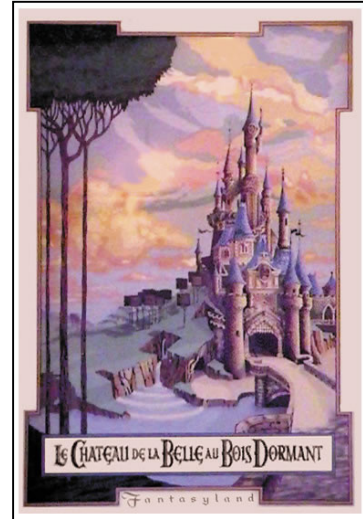


The ride begins there on the banks of the Blue Lagoon Restaurant, a lush pool filled with the chirping sound of crickets, gushing water cascading over rock cliffs, the soft light of fireflies and the poignant sound of thunderclaps rolling through a cooler, night-time sky (not to mention the clanks of forks, spoons and plates). Soon your lazy jaunt turns ominous as the dingy passes through the wreck of a ship half-sunk and passes through the gates of an old fortress. And before you know it, you're being hoisted up into the citadel – the clank of swords coming together and blasts of cannon fire all around. Once inside you sail through a number of chambers where a fierce pirate battle is being raged, and find many of the attractions signature scenes: the Bride Auction, the Burning Town, the Dog with Keys, Dead Man's Cave and much, much more all in brilliant new-like finishes. But you'll also find a number of different touches here too, such as a Swinging Buccaneer and the Dueling Swordfighters, which feature the most advanced animatronic figures of their kind – they really swing and sword fight!

By the time the ride came to a splashy conclusion we were singing mightily heartily – “yo ho, yo ho, a pirate's life for me! We pillage, we plunder, we rifle and loot, Drink up me hearties, yo ho!” We sang it to the tune of three times in a row, before moving on to Fantasyland, and we loved every moment sacking the Spanish Main.



Over in **Fantasyland**, one will find many classical attractions, such as: Le Château de la Belle au Bois Dormant (Sleeping Beauty's Castle), La Tanière du Dragon (the Dragon's Lair), Blanche-Neige et les Sept Nains (Snow White's Scary Adventures), Les Voyages de Pinocchio (Pinocchio's Daring Journey), Casey Jr. - Le Petit Train du Cirque (a small rollercoaster for kids featuring Casey Jr. Circus Train), Le Carrousel de Lancelot (Lancelot's Carousel), Dumbo the Flying Elephant, Alice's Curious Labyrinth (a hedge maze themed from Alice in Wonderland), Mad Hatter's Tea Cups (the infamous spinning tea cups), Peter Pan's Flight, and "it's a small world" all fairly well contained within an old European style township.



Unfortunately we didn't spend a lot of time in Fantasyland, much to my chagrin, preferring instead to head back and forth across the park revisiting attractions like the Phantom Manor, Big Thunder Mountain, and, of course, Pirates of the Caribbean and Adventure Island, and even pressing forward into Discoveryland to ride Space Mountain. The time we did spend, though, was spent well. We got lost in "Alice's Curious Labyrinth" and enjoyed exploring "Sleeping Beauty's Castle".





As the name suggest, “Alice’s Curious Labyrinth” is an attraction based on a number of scenes and characters from Disney’s 1951 animated feature *Alice in Wonderland*, and you’ll find a plethora of twist and turns within this labyrinthine maze of hedges (not to mention quite a few frustrating dead ends). If you’re lucky, or I suppose that’s unlucky, you’ll even encounter the White Rabbit, the Cheshire cat and/or the Queen of Hearts and her

gaggle of suited cards. Your goal is to escape and return to the real world, however, but tempting fate by reaching Queen’s castle is more rewarding – a wonderful aerial view of this side of the park, which you can get nowhere else, awaits!



At the center of the park is “Sleeping Beauty’s Castle” one of the more unique icons built at a Disneyland-based park. Inspired by Neuschwanstein Castle in Bavaria, Southern Germany (the very same that inspired the original Sleeping Beauty’s Castle at Disneyland in Anaheim) measures 148 feet (45 meters) tall and features a number of interesting attractions, such as “*Galerie de la Belle au Bois Dormant*”, a gallery that illustrates the story of Sleeping Beauty in tapestries, stained glass windows and figurines (on the second floor); “*la Boutique du Château*”, a shop selling Christmas ornaments year-round; and “*Merlin l'Enchanteur*”, a shop specializing in handmade glass figures.

Below ground, within the depths of the castle, lies “*La Tanière du Dragon*” (the Dragon’s Lair. Here you’ll find one of the largest animatronic figures in the park, an 89-foot sleeping dragon! Explore the catacombs thoroughly but step carefully; try not to wake her up because in her rage she might break the chains binding her to the dungeon rock and come after you.



Oops, too late! Run! Run to Discoveryland!

Well before his contemporaries imagined it could be possible, Jules Verne dreamed of traveling 20,000 leagues under the sea and Leonardo da Vinci realized that human beings could fly centuries before the first air flight. They were two of the world's greatest visionaries representative of all the scientists and poets who thought that man could defy the laws of gravity, free himself from the surly bonds of Earth, travel amongst the stars, and perhaps even beyond time itself. **Discoveryland** pays tribute to their foresight and imagination by allowing us to go back in time and travel forward to the future through the eyes of these two visionaries.



Here we find Autopia (the grand prix), Le Visionarium (a 360-degree circle-vision film), Les Mystères du Nautilus (a walkthrough of Captain Nemo's submarine based on 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea), the L'Orbitron: Machines Volantes (the Orbitron, aerial orbiting space ships), Honey I Shrunk the Audience (3D film adventure), Star Tours (simulated ride to the moon of Endor), and, of course, Space Mountain: De la Terre à la Lune (From the Earth to the Moon).

While there are a number of interesting attractions to discover here in Discoveryland, we were only interested in one, really: Space Mountain. We heard this version of our favorite "mountain" coaster was vastly different than what could be found at the Magic Kingdom, Disneyland

in Anaheim or Tokyo Disneyland, but in what ways? How about a grander, more detailed appearance, a huge dominating Columbiad Cannon, a Synchronized On-Board Audio Track (SOBAT) system, and a couple of inversions not found at any other Disneyland park?

Themed around Jules Verne's novel "From the Earth to the Moon", this unique take on Space Mountain is anything but normal. For starters, you launch into the stars via the canon from the OUTSIDE of the attraction, pulling 1.5 G's at lift-off; second, you fly through space at an amazing 42 miles-per-hour (68 KPH) – the fastest version of Space Mountain in existence; and third, experience three inversion-maneuvers while in flight – a sidewinder, corkscrew and cutback – all the while enjoying a cosmic soundtrack as you rock along the 3280 feet of track. Now if that doesn't get your heart pumping, I don't know what will!



* * *

Our evening at Disneyland Paris ended with a rousing performance of the Main Street Electrical Parade, as I previously mentioned. And I couldn't have asked for a better send off. Consequently, neither could the native French – I found them stomping and clapping along just as their American counterparts would. And they say there's no American spirit within... You know, there's so much to explore here at Disneyland Paris I simply can't discuss them all in the limited time that I have. And even if I could in order to get a grasp of the park's very essence, to breathe in every nuance, you just have to visit it.

Thankfully we've decided to come back tomorrow to check out the resort's other park (Walt Disney Studios), have dinner at the beautiful Disneyland Hotel, and perhaps hop back into the main Disneyland Park to catch a few more attractions. I do hope so... I had wanted to ride It's a Small World and the rest of the Fantasyland attractions we missed earlier. And, of course, Phantom Manor and Pirates of the Caribbean too!

Jusque-là! (until then!)



Expedition: Europe

Paris, FR



“Plan du Parc: Disney Studios Paris”

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29+H

Today we returned to the Disneyland Paris Resort for a second day of Disney-filled fun, as planned – this time at the resort’s second park. Although ultimately disappointed at the offerings at the offerings at Disney Studios Paris Park, we still managed to have a fantastic time exploring the park, peeking at the Disney Village, eating dinner in the Disneyland Hotel and hopping back into Disneyland Park.



Thankfully, with proper knowledge of the train, or RER, we arrived at the resort just as the gates to the kingdom opened. I neglected to mention yesterday; however, the RER (*Réseau Express Régional*) is a regional express transit system serving Paris and its outer suburbs. The system is an integration of a modern city-center subway with a pre-existing set of regional rail lines. Within the city of Paris, the RER serves as an express network, offering multiple connections with the Métro. Outside the

city’s boundaries, the system serves as an inter-connecting link between the various neighborhoods of Paris’ suburbs and outlying environs. The network consists of five lines labeled A (red), B (blue), C (yellow), D (green) and E (purple), which cross into and out of the city at various points. While it’s not the only way to leave the city, it’s the best and most efficient way to reach Parc Disneyland, accomplished by riding RER-A.

RER Line A is made up of five different branches – three to the west (before you get into the center of Paris) and two in the east (after you leave the central city), running from Saint-Germain-en-Laye (A1), Cergy Le Haut (A3), and Poissy (A5) to Boissy-Saint-Léger (A2) and Marne-la-Vallée-Chessy (A4). Therefore, in order to reach Disneyland you should take RER-A4. Had we known Line-A actually branched off onto two different paths in Disneyland’s direction we would’ve been more attentive and not hopped onto the wrong train yesterday. It was our first trip on the system after all, so we did forgive ourselves, but how embarrassing, no?

Saviez-vous Que?

Did you know that Line A is one of Europe’s busiest rail lines? It serves over 1 million passengers daily.

Alas that wasn't an issue – no need to switch trains at Vincennes today! And that was half the battle really. The other would be the ever-changing weather.

Same story there – cool and sunny – but by the time we reached the resort terminal the weather turned a little nastier: cold, cloudy and rainy. At least today we were prepared for the change; yesterday was quite a different matter. Although the weather did start out smashingly good yesterday, it grew bitter cold and windy throughout the day. So cold in fact we had no choice but to break off our explorations to go in search of warmer gear. Both Maya and I purchased new knit-caps, similar to a Tuque or Chullo – although mine did not have ear flaps (but hers did). I hated to buy another one since I brought a WDW branded one from home, little good it did me sitting at the hotel, though. At least I had a great excuse to buy a nifty little Disneyland Paris souvenir!

Regardless of what met us upon stepping off the train, we went forward and into the Walt Disney Studios Park...

On March 16, 2002, Walt Disney Studios Paris opened its doors as Disney's newest theme park, and second "gate" at Disneyland Resort Paris. Built around the subject of a working film and animation studio, a number of rides, shows and attractions were built to help populate this theme, but sadly it is neither. Many of the park's icons and attractions have been borrowed from other Disney parks worldwide (though you will find a small number of unique attractions here); thus it came as no surprise to us that the park shares most of its thematic elements (and its developmental history) with another we are most familiar with: the Disney-MGM Studios Park at Walt Disney World in Orlando.



Like its cousin park in Orlando, the various "lands" are divided up to resemble lots from a television or film studio – there's FRONT LOT, ANIMATION COURTYARD, PRODUCTION COURTYARD and BACK LOT. But unlike its cousin (and its sister next door), the park lacked a number of interesting, well-thought out attractions. Couple that with the park's hastily cobbled together appearance – intentional or not – left us sorely disappointed. In fact it's one of the biggest complaints I had about the park from the moment we stepped inside – the complete and utter disregard for presentation. Compared to its sister park – Disneyland Park Paris – the contrast is staggering. The Studios Park exists as nothing more than a shell, a series of boxy soundstages signed only with logo marquees, rather than the intricately themed queues and entranceways we've come to expect out of Disney Imagineering. It's sad to see how little an effort was placed on adding those light thematically touches and wonderfully executed themes that accompany the company's other parks, and I find it quite disturbing.

Be that as it may, let's take a walk through the park, shall we?



The 33-meter high “Earful Tower”, stretching into the blue morning sky, shows visitors the way to Walt Disney Studios, and the **FRONT LOT**, which serves as the Park’s main entrance. Enter *Place des Frères Lumière*, a spacious square surrounded by palm trees, fountains and Studio 1 (the largest building at the park) and become swept into a whirlwind of thrills and sensations as you quest to discover the captivating world of moving pictures. Or so they say.



Inside “Studio 1”, the intention is to find yourself right in the middle of a film set. Based on the first ever soundstage Walt Disney himself owned at the Disney Bros. Studios on Hyperion Avenue in Burbank, California, Studio 1 is a “boulevard of dreams” says Disney, re-creating Hollywood Boulevard at its height. The different façades here recall the fanciful styles of 20th century architecture from the golden years of Tinseltown merged with the concept of building façades built on soundstages. You’ll find Shutterbugs, made to resemble a giant camera; Alexandria Theatre, with its highly ornate façade; the Hollywood Department store, with its huge hieroglyphic-filled Egyptian pillars; Schwabs, the famous drug store; and even Last Chance Gas, an era gas station somewhere on the famed Route 66. Slip through the door of the Brown Derby and you’ll find a number of caricatures from stars of film and radio hanging about. And you can even have a drink in the Liki Tiki tropical bar, complete with plaited palm roof. But, behind the windows of these “true-to-life” façades is, sadly, just a counter-service restaurant.

The rest of the park opens up to you once you pass through Studio 1, finding yourself on Production Courtyard. To the right is the Animation Courtyard and left the Back Lot. We decided to catch a few thrills first, so...



Out in the **BACKLOT**, you're invited to discover the history of special effects in the film industry, starting with its pioneers and ending with the latest innovations from the digital magicians of today. Three attractions help accomplish this goal: "Armageddon Les Effets Speciaux", "Rock 'n' Roller Coaster avec Aerosmith", and "Moteurs... Action! Stunt Show Spectacular".

Within Studio 7-A, "*Armageddon Les Effets Speciaux*" invites us to climb aboard a working set – the spectacular Russian space station from the blockbuster thriller *Armageddon* – to learn about and experience first-hand the special effects process from beginning to end. The first half of the attraction is a long film piece hosted by Michael Clark Duncan, one of the film's stars. He presents a tribute to Georges Méliès, legendary French filmmaker (credited with such classics as "*Le voyage dans la Lune*" and "*Le voyage à travers l'impossible*") and father of today's special effects, and a high-level explanation of some of the effects created and used in the movie through a number of special effects scenes of other films in the Disney catalogue. Upon its conclusion we're shuffled onto the main set itself, the central docking node of the space station. Gather round and stay clear of the walls we're warned and then the director yells...



"**ACTION!**"

In a special effects show similar in thrill to "Alien Encounter" at Walt Disney World (whereby you're thrust into a rapidly decaying situation), mayhem ensues as the station wanders into a meteor shower. As the fast-moving meteoroids impact the station, their collision violently shakes the central node apart and for a mere moment you're safe. Sparks fly the moment the hull is breached creating a cascade of malfunctions unforeseen by the station's designers. ("*c'est un veritable cataclysm!*"). Your life-giving oxygen begins seeping out into deep space. The change in pressure causes the station's metal-works to buckle; in response the ceiling comes ever closer to total collapse. Power is lost next, thrusting you and your compatriots into complete and total darkness. But that only lasts a moment; the ceiling finally gives way causing a massive explosion to erupt from deep within the station's core. As the fireball rips through the decks below you're given only a moment to wonder what on Earth could have happened and in the next flash, the station is destroyed with us along with it.

"**CUT!**"



Wow, that was intense! Thank goodness it was only a special effects demonstration, yeah? Although the pre-show is interesting, it runs a bit long, which overshadows the entire experience. Be that as it may, *Armageddon Les Effets Speciaux*, is quite a thrilling attraction. One of the ride's highlights includes an actual prop from the film – the armadillo drilling machine used to bore into the asteroid. Good stuff!

Next door is the “*Moteurs... Action! Stunt Show Spectacular*” attraction. Although closed for the season and thus unavailable to us, I understand the basic premise of the attraction falls somewhere along the line of massive movie set with car chases, gunfire, huge explosions and loud noises showcasing a number of stunt sequences. Am I right?



“*Rock 'n' Roller Coaster avec Aerosmith*” strives to place riders inside the music (and does it quite well actually!) Using a prototype vehicle known as a “Soundtracker”, fans are invited to participate in a revolutionary new music experience pioneered by the rock group – rather than sit and listen to the music, Aerosmith wants you to feel it, to become part of their concert in an explosive new way.

To that end they've partnered with their label, Tour de Force Records, to engineer this innovative experience, which offers one of the best thrill-rides at the park. Although drawing its technology and track layout from its cousin-coaster at Disney-MGM Studios in Orlando, the experience here is vastly different. Rather than race across the Los Angeles freeways to attend a special VIP concert (as you do in Orlando), we descend, loop, and bend around the set up of the concert itself. Road signs and exit ramps are replaced with lighting rigs, projectors, strobe lights and smoke effects as we accelerate from 0 to 100 kph in just under 3 seconds, rocking out to the pounding rhythm of “Back in the Saddle”, “Dude Looks Like A Lady”, “Young Lust”, “F.I.N.E.”, “Love in an Elevator”, “Walk this Way”, “Nine Lives” or “Sweet Emotion (live)” over 120 loud speakers.

Awesome ride!



Over in **PRODUCTION** and **ANIMATION COURTYARDS** exist the remainder of the park's rides and attractions, such as the "Studio Tram Tour" and the "Television Production Tour at Walt Disney Television Studios", the twin theater based shows "CinéMagique" and "Animagique", and the perennial "Art of Disney Animation" tour.

Thus we accepted an invitation to discover all the unexpected events of backstage cinema onboard the "*Studio Tram Tour*", which takes riders back beyond the confines of the park into the Boneyard – where a number of props are on display: a huge set piece from Disney's short-lived series "Dinotopia", airplanes from "Pearl Harbor" and a collection of famous cars used in various movies; to Catastrophe Canyon – a 'hot' street-



like set where we're suddenly thrown into the heart of filming an earthquake disaster scene; to the Wardrobe Department – where the park's costumes are designed and produced; and a Topiary Garden – a boneyard for leafy creations and props. Much of the tour is familiar territory: the tram ride, the props, the Boneyard and Catastrophe Canyon are all features of the attraction's counterpart at the Disney-MGM Studios in Orlando. Two things set this one apart, however. The entire trip is narrated via an onboard television unit by our old Lion King pal Jeremy Irons, rather than on the fly by the tram's driver. And we visit a second "disaster" scene, a rather apocalyptic re-creation of London under attack from a fire-breathing dragon. I must say it was spot on – the logos, the signs, and even the Underground Line depicted in the scene were re-created with such attention to detail. It made me long for a return to London.



Over at "*Animagique*", Donald Duck, who is as mischievous as ever, is left to his own devices in the studios' drafting room after losing a drawing contest with his old nemesis Mickey Mouse. Frustrated at his defeat, Donald walks around in a huff and eventually finds Mickey's key to the vault. Although Mickey

instructs Donald not to open the studio's film vault before he leaves, Donald is unable to resist and becomes an unwitting guide through the history of Disney animation in the process. *Animagique* is an interesting journey brought to life through a mix of live-action and cinema-based techniques to re-create a number of memorable and heartwarming scenes from the best animated classics in Disney's portfolio: Dumbo the Flying Elephant, The Jungle Book, Pinocchio, The Little Mermaid and the Lion King. And although at times a little childish and a little confusing, it's a show we'll never forget. The French audience rather enjoyed it though.

A big sorcerer's apprentice's hat points the way towards the "Art of Disney Animation", a second animated related attraction that takes you behind the scenes of Disney animation. Your tour begins in the animation gallery, where a number of unique exhibits and art specimens are on display. In the center of the room is a zoetrope device illuminating how the quick succession of still pictures animates a scene – with Dumbo's help. Or

you can look over Disney's infamous multi-plane camera. Departing the gallery, the next leg of the experience is contained in a theater whereby a video is shown glorifying classic Disney animation.



For fans of the tour it is the exact same video as shown at the Disney-MGM Studios park in Orlando with some minor changes for European audiences – namely scenes are sampled in French, Spanish, Italian, German and English. The next stop is "Drawn to Animation". In this theater we watched a funny interaction with Mushu, the little dragon from Mulan, as he shows us how Disney characters are created and selected to become stars. Narrated by Chris Sanders, the creator of Mushu, we see just how interesting and creative the process really is, much to Mushu's chagrin too. He exclaims he's been everything except a chicken and a peanut, and he's right! The final leg of the tour is a room filled with hands-on kiosks that allow visitors to paint characters with an electronic brush, add your own sound effects to a specific scene, or join the animation academy and draw one of your favorite Disney characters.



And last but not least, you can fly away on the "Flying Carpets over Agrabah" to explore the fabulous world of the Arabian Nights. The Genie and his mischievous filming crew will let you take part in the filming of a flying carpet chase at sunset in the town of Agrabah. All you have to do is hop aboard and hold on – the genie will do the rest! Although the attraction sounds like a nifty ride, it's nothing more than

another hub-and-spoke clone of Dumbo tucked into a corner of the park. The sad thing is the Flying Carpets take up so much prime real estate that could be put to better use, especially since the "sunset scene" is nothing more than a cardboard-looking backdrop. Couldn't you do better Disney?

They say first impressions and last peeks leave lasting marks on one's opinion on a particular subject or location, and that is absolutely true. From the inconceivable cheapness inside Studio 1's façades and the ride's marquees to poorly placed, or poorly conceived attractions, such as the Flying Carpets, the rides and attractions that were indeed interesting were just not enough to redeem the park. Still, there's evidence that change is on the way: while we sat in the courtyard sipping on a bottle of water we noticed a familiar logo etched into a nearby building – the infamous HTH belonging to the Hollywood Tower Hotel. So it appears that Imagineering is set to add a little punch to the park with the Tower of Terror, which will be a welcome addition to be sure.



Now if they could just do something with those marquees, and spruce up the theme, I think they'd have a great park here! Be that as it may, after the Animation Tour and a quick breeze-through the studio store, we made our way back over to Disneyland Park and spent the rest of the evening basking in its charm.

Hopping over also allowed us to run through some of our favorite attractions again (Pirates of the Caribbean and Phantom Manor of course), as well as take in the rides and attractions in Fantasyland that we didn't have time for the day before, such as: "it's a small world", "Blanche-Neige et les Sept Nains" (Snow White's Scary Adventures), "Pinocchio's Fantastic Journey", "Dumbo: the Flying Elephant", and "Peter Pan's Flight". Although Fantasyland is populated by various famed dark rides (which I wanted to make sure I experienced), taking a moment to explore this intricately detailed part of the park was equally rewarding.

Enter Fantasyland through the fates of Sleeping Beauty's castle – you won't be sorry. It is through here you find the true sense of the fantasy world Walt Disney's Imagineers intended for patrons to experience – a small kingdom clinging to the banks of a meandering stream with manicured gardens, an abundance of flowers, and a true sense of village.





coach in the corner), “La Menagerie du Royaume” (the Kingdom’s Zoo – featuring plush toys, books and various souvenirs), and Sir Mickey’s (you can’t miss the beanstalk!).

Continuing on your exploration of Fantasyland from here you’ll first come upon “Le Carrousel de Lancelot”, and although we did not mount any of the carousel’s steeds, it’s worth noting that, unlike all other Disney carousels, the carousel here features multi-colored horses (instead of the royal white standard) who are dressed with elaborate armor fit for a king. “Snow White’s Scary Adventures” is actually quite scary – the trees move in on you, skeletons creep up to you, more dark places can be found and, yes, even the old witch who is just naturally scary, moves more life-like. “Peter Pan’s Flight” too is very similar to its counterparts – your journey begins in the nursery of the Darling home then you fly above the skies of London, around the Houses of Parliament and higher still, off to Neverland, to meet mermaids and Indians, and battle Captain Hook and Mr. Smee – but more elaborate in set design, dressing and presentation.



This version of “It’s a Small World” was very beautiful and inspiring. It all looked so new and invigorating, featuring various scenes not seen at the WDW version I’m used to – more elaborate decorations, a beautiful loading zone, and more inclusive of the world’s population, including a separate room for North America (with dolls representing the United States, Canada and Mexico) and a complete Middle Eastern room (with the famous song sung in Arabic) – it’s fantastic!

There is one small attraction here that is not available at Walt Disney World that I found very likable, “Les Voyages de Pinocchio”, or Pinocchio’s Daring Journey. Much like Snow White and Peter Pan’s attractions, Pinocchio’s takes us through his story in vignette form. We see Pinocchio as he’s lured by the cunning Honest John and Gideon to join Stromboli’s puppet show. We run with him as he escapes to Pleasure Island and becomes partially turned into a donkey. Next, with the help of Jiminy Cricket, Pinocchio’s conscious, we locate Geppetto and save him from Monstro the whale. And in the end, we celebrate along with him as the Blue Fairy grants Pinocchio’s wish to become a real boy.



Even timeless classics like Dumbo the Flying Elephant and the Mad Hatters Tea Party also affords unique experiences, missing from their Walt Disney Counterparts. Each of these attractions is seated in such beautiful nooks of Fantasyland, situated on the banks of its meandering brook surrounded by flowers, hedges and trees. And each has a unique style that sets it apart from its counterparts: the Tea Cups has a very colorful and

intricately designed glass roof that fits well with the whimsy of the land, and Dumbo loads patrons over water. You just don’t see those things at Walt Disney World.

Oh, and one last thing: Toad Lives! Although you won’t find Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride here at Disneyland Paris, his legacy lives on in the form of a restaurant. Enter the stately manor of Toad Hall and you’ll find yourself in Toad heaven – portraits adorn the walls and statues garnish the halls; his caricature can even be found in the wallpaper! If you’re a fan of Mr. Toad and his Wild Ride, you’ll not want to miss this little gem!



By the time evening fell we reluctantly left the park to make our dinner reservation over at Disneyland Hotel's "gastronomic haute cuisine" restaurant – California Grill. As also fans of Disney restaurants, we were quite familiar with the menu of California Grill; therefore, we knew we'd be in for a fantastic meal. But if we thought the California Grill atop Disney's Contemporary Resort at Walt Disney World was a succulent treat,

there were no words to describe the restaurant we experienced tonight. Elegance was elevated to a level I could never have imagined.



Disney turned the most perfect restaurant into a gastronomic art form hard to surpass – the magnificent plate of cheeses, the amazing selection of wine, the food (superb) and the desserts (oh, you've got to try "the chocolate", a chocolate tart in a cherry sauce with thin chocolate fudge doodles drizzled around it – amazingly good!). But then again they upped the ante with the entire Disneyland hotel. It too is an incredibly themed resort.

And picturesque; leaving the resort we stumbled upon a bridge and groom party taking wedding photographs.

Ahh Paris...

What an end to an amazing day!

We're settled back here in our hotel now reliving our experiences here in Paris to the fullest. Not quite sure what's next on the agenda for us. There's talk about returning to the Louvre, the Eiffel Tower or just taking it easy meandering down the Champs-Élysées so we'll where the day takes us at sunrise! For now, I'm bushed...

Bonne nuit! (good night!)

Expedition: Europe

Paris, FR



“Let it Snow, Let it Snow...”

THURSDAY, JANUARY 30TH

There's nothing better than a hot shower on a cold, snowy evening, is there?

Even surrounded by the sights and sounds of the “City of Lights”, this holds true, doesn't it? Sorry, I'm waxing a little philosophical this evening; you've caught me just getting out of the shower here at our hostel – Caulaincourt at 2 Square Caulaincourt, 75018 Paris – and I find myself clean and refreshed. Give me a moment to— there, dressed.

It's not often I don't have to rush through a shower on this trip. Nor is it that often I have the room all to myself. But this evening the stars have aligned and I find both true tonight. Why is that? Well, after taking care of many essentials today (a visit to an internet café and a trek to *Gare de Bercy* to procure rail tickets to Firenze) little time was left for much sightseeing, and since Cedric and Maya expressed interest in doing some shopping (which holds little interest with me), I therefore took my leave and returned here for the night. At least I'm not out in the snow. And who would have thought it would start snowing while we were at the Internet Café this morning! It's sure set the presse on fire today and made our time at Bercy a living hell. But that's all behind me now. I find taking this moment to be quite relaxing. It's actually given me a chance to re-coop from our days on-the-go here in Paris, prepare for the next leg in our journey (yep, I'm pretty much packed up for Firenze, or Florence) and get some lingering questions I've had about the city's division, the currency in use here and paintings at the Louvre.

Did you know that France is the largest state in the European Union? I read that earlier; measured by area, France covers 547,030 square kilometers (211,209 square miles) of land, which makes it slightly larger than Spain, one of its neighbors. It is also the third largest country in Europe behind Russia and the Ukraine. Despite its size France has earned a nickname – L'Hexagone (the Hexagon) – due to its geometric shape, but the French take it with pride. There is no denying it – look (right). Besides, the French also take pride in their dominion, which stretches from the Mediterranean Sea (in the south) to the English Channel and the North Sea (in the north), and from the Rhine river (in the east) to the Bay of Biscay and Atlantic Ocean (in the west) and shares its borders with Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Monaco, Spain and Andorra.



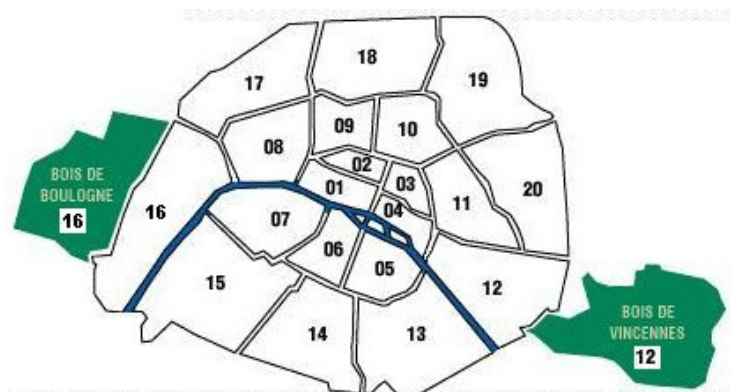
What has fascinated me, but so far been elusive, was how the country was divided administratively, and after reading through one of the pamphlets I picked up about (before packing it away), I've since found the country is divided up into 22 régions, 96 départements, 330 arrondissements, 3,883 cantons, 36,569 communes, and 45 municipal arrondissements (of which Paris alone has 20). While this may sound a bit confusing, after trying to understand how the United Kingdom was subdivided, this is a piece of cake. Think of a région in terms of the subdivisions of the United States only with more historical significance (remember these regions used to be separate royal kingdoms and such, not just purchases of land). Departments then can be loosely thought of as equivalent to states, cantons as counties, arrondissements as county districts, communes as cities and municipal arrondissements as city boroughs.

So there are a lot of high-level and low-level administrative divisions. The most important here, I think, are the regions, départements and communes. An interesting thing of note, although not easy to append here, is that each region is ordained with its own unique flag, each district a crest or coat of arms, and many cantons and communes with a pair of each, all equally unique and suited for their historical niche of the country. Since we are located in the Île-de-France region, the region's flag (top right) and city's crest (bottom right) are represented. Notice the fleur-de-lis (the yellow flowers) is still prominently featured. It is a symbol of the French Monarchy.



Arrondissements of Paris	
1st	Louvre
2nd	Bourse
3rd	Temple
4th	Hôtel-de-Ville
5th	Panthéon
6th	Luxembourg
7th	Palais-Bourbon
8th	Élysée
9th	Opéra
10th	Enclos-St-Laurent
11th	Popincourt
12th	Reuilly
13th	Gobelins
14th	Observatoire
15th	Vaugirard
16th	Passy
17th	Batignolles-Monceau
18th	Montmartre
19th	Chaumont
20th	Ménilmontant

Paris is one of three unique communes in levels of administration, as its size dictates its own arrondissement divisions (municipal), a descriptor I have seen and read in travel guides as means of describing a particular location, and even on avenue markers on the sides of buildings. For example, the Arc de Triomphe is located in Arrondissement VIII (or VIII^e), the Louvre in Arrondissement I, and the Eiffel Tower in Arrondissement VII among others. What does it all mean and how is the city divided? Much like the country it turns out; quite logically. The twenty arrondissements of Paris are arranged in the form of a clockwise spiral, starting in the middle of the city, with the first on the right bank (north bank) of the Seine and continuing outward. [Depicted Below]



Caulaincourt Square, our hostel, is located in the XVIII Arrondissement (18^e or XVIII^e) more commonly referred to as the Montmartre district, and as I said upon arrival, it is a district with character. How much so I didn't know until wandering its streets on my way back.

Although you might say we're on the edge of Paris's limits, and thus far from the action, we're actually not. A seven-station ride on the Metro is all it takes and, viola, we're right in the middle of the Champs-Élysées at Place de la Concorde. Besides, the Montmartre district has a charm all its own – I don't think I'd want to stay anywhere else. Both the Basilique du Sacré-Cœur and the cabaret Moulin Rouge are nearby. The area also has its roots in the arts; many artists had studios or worked in the area in years past, such as: Salvador Dalí, Modigliani, Claude Monet, Pablo Picasso and Vincent van Gogh. And through Cedric and Maya I've since learned that this particular area is also often used as a backdrop for the film industry. *Amélie*, a film which I am familiar but haven't seen, was filmed in the area (in fact Abbesses, where we found the internet café, was prominently featured, as were a number of cafés nearby). So, while perhaps not the most flamboyant or the busiest district in Paris... I've come to the conclusion that it's one of the finest.

Wait... that map kind of looks like a snail doesn't it?

Although the arrondissements are not the final divisions of the city (each district is further sub-divided into four "Quartiers", or neighborhoods), I'll spare you the endless details since there are a total of 80 of those – hey, what can I say, it's the analyst in me. Reading up on the city's administrative divisions has taken only part of my time so far this evening. Even more fascinating was getting a chance to thumb through some of the pictures taken while at the Louvre earlier in the week and researching a little more about the paintings on display. Although each and every one of those paintings was magnificent in their own right, there were a few that stood out above all others. Some thoughts and insights on these gifts of art, with passages courtesy of the Louvre and its documentation:

- In "The Oath of Horatii", the three Horatii brothers, chosen by the Romans to defy the Curiatii, the champions of the town of Alba, are swearing to put an end to the bloody war between the two around the 7th century BC. As they receive their weapons from their father, the women of the family are prostrate with suffering: Sabina, the sister of the Curiatii and wife of the eldest of the Horatii, and Camilla, the sister of the Horatii and betrothed to one of the Curiatii, hang their heads in sorrow, while behind them, the mother of the Horatii hugs her grandchildren. David achieved a Classical effect in his work by arranging the figures so they could be read from left to right as in a sculptural frieze and by giving them the idealized bodies of Classical art. By omitting distracting details from the corners of his paintings, he further enhanced the sense that his central figures had been sculpted instead of painted. His style gave rise to what is now referred to as neoclassicism.



- “The Coronation of Napoleon and Josephine” – Napoleon orchestrated his own coronation and then guided David in painting it. For instance, Napoleon’s mother did not attend, probably because of her disapproval of her son’s grandiose ambitions, but Napoleon insisted that David depict her seated prominently at the center of the festivities. David also shows the pope’s hand raised in benediction, contrary to the report of eyewitnesses who described him sitting with both hands rested on his knees.



- “The Wedding Feast at Cana” depicts a miracle story from the New Testament as told in the Gospel of John – the turning of water into wine. What caught my attention was this canvass enormous size (6.77 meters by 9.94 meters) and its array of color. Furthermore, you’ll find no less than 130 feast-goers, several dogs, birds, a parakeet, and a cat frolic amidst the crowd. “The Triumph of Titus and Vespasian” depicts a triumphant Titus and Vespasian as they ride into Rome on a chariot, preceded by a parade carrying the spoils from the decisive victory over Judea by the Romans in 70 BC. Judea here is embodied by a female prisoner led by her hair.



- “Old Man with a Child” – This double portrait by the Florentine artist Ghirlandaio summarizes many of the new secular values of the Early Renaissance, such as its human-centeredness and its preference for simple scenes. Further, the work’s subject, possibly a man with his grandchild, indicates the important role that the family played in the life of the times. In addition, the age’s commitment to direct observation of the physical world is evident in the treatment of the man’s diseased nose and the landscape glimpsed through the open window. Finally, the painter has made the exterior scene realistic by using linear and atmospheric perspective – two new techniques invented during the period.



- “Baldassare Castiglione” – Castiglione was memorialized in this handsome portrait by Raphael, one of the great portrait painters of the High Renaissance. Raphael’s debt to Leonardo’s portrait style, especially as represented by the Mona Lisa, is evident in the half-length, seated pose and the direct gaze of the subject. Elegantly groomed and completely at ease, Castiglione appears here as the age’s ideal courtier.



- “Portrait of Louis XIV” (Hyacinthe Rigaud) – Louis XIV had the longest reign of any European monarch, and the spirit of much of the seventeenth century was set by his concept of government. In this portrait by Louis’s court artist, the love of grandeur and exaggeration characteristic with the Baroque age is apparent. The French monarch was barely 5 feet tall, but here he seems every inch the king, preening in his coronation robes. The Baroque love of theatricality is also evident in the placement of the King’s feet – a pose inspired by the ballets and court dances in which he sometimes performed.

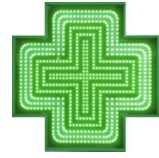


- “The Virgin of the Rocks” – Two slightly different versions of this work exist, an early one dating from 1483 and now hanging here in the Louvre and a later one done in 1506 and on view in the National Gallery in London. The Louvre painting, with its carefully observed botanical specimens, is the culmination of the scientific side of the Early Renaissance, with its arbitrary features – the grotto setting and the unusual perspective – which call attention to Leonardo’s confident genius.
- “The Lacemaker” – Unlike Rembrandt, Vermeer was not concerned with human personality as such. Rather, his aim was to create scenes that registered a deep pleasure in bourgeois order and comfort. In the Lacemaker, he gives his female subject generalized features, but renders her sewing in exquisite detail, giving it a monumental presence. This painting thus becomes a visual metaphor of a virtuous household.



What fantastic art, no?

I know this is a change of tack, but, do you know what you should never travel without? It's not a shaving razor, it's not toilet paper and it's not nail clippers (although those are also essentials – could you imagine going 30 days without cutting your nails?). You should never travel without Q-tips!



Sorry, I just couldn't take it anymore; I had to run out a moment to find some. If you recall, there's a pharmacy just round the corner from us (remember, I had to stop and get band-aids for my feet there when we arrived?), so a huge trek wasn't needed. Thankfully they had some I could purchase because my ears were screaming for a more thorough cleaning, don't you know. Consequently, should you also need Q-tips (or a razor blade, toilet paper, or nail clippers), look for the green-lit cross on the side of buildings – that's your sign for the pharmacie!

The great thing about going down to the “pharmacie”, other than the Q-tips, was for the Euros – I just got the last remaining national coin of France I had been missing (in good condition): a 20-cent piece. All the other versions I've carried this far have come from one of the other European Union nations, or have been dirty.



The Euro (denoted EUR, or €) is the currency of the European Union and comes, like all forms of money, in two types: paper bills and metallic coins. Bills exist in denominations of €5, €10, €20, €50, €100, €200, €500 and coins 1-cent, 2-cent, 5-cent, 10-cent, 20-cent, 50-cent, €1 and €2 denominations. And although you'd think it mundane, the Euro is perhaps one of the most unique series of money I've ever come across. The bills, which are uniquely sized and color coded to aid those who are visually impaired, have a design that is identical across the entire Eurozone (the member countries) although printed by various member states, but the eight coin denominations have twelve variations – one for each member of the union: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Greece.

Starting with the coins, you'll find they all have a common reverse (a map of Europe), but they also have a nationalized obverse, which states personalize to represent their membership. Republics of the European Union generally feature national monuments, symbols or other designs closely associated with them. And France offers a perfect example of this: the €1 and €2 coins feature a tree symbolizing life, continuity and growth. It is contained in a hexagon (the nickname of the country, remember?) and encircled by the motto of the Republic, “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité” (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity). The 10, 20 and 50-cent coins represent the Sower, which is a timeless representation of France. The 1, 2 and 5-cent coins depict a young, feminine Marianne (Liberty) with determined features that embody the desire for a sound and lasting Europe.





As for the bills, common to all notes is the inclusion of the European flag, the initials of the ECB (European Central Bank) depending on where it's printed (either BCE, ECB, EZB, EKT and EKP), a map of Europe on the reverse, the name "Euro" in two scripts (Latin and Greek, as "ΕΥΡΩ") and the signature of the current bank president. Other than various identification and checksum codes, anti-counterfeit measures (such as a holo-strip and watermarks); each bill features a common theme of European architecture in various artistic periods. The front (or what is called recto) of the note features windows or gateways while the back (or verso) depicts bridges. The examples are stylized illustrations rather than representing specific existing monuments so as to show unity. The €5 note (grey) has a classical theme, the €10 note (red) has a Romanesque theme, the €20 note (blue) has a gothic theme, the €50 note (orange) has a renaissance theme, the €100 note (green) has a baroque & rococo theme, the €200 note (yellow) has an art nouveau look, and the €500 (purple) features modern contemporary themes.

In either case the currency of the European Union is much more interesting than our "greenbacks". It's akin to the Canadian currency, which is just as colorful across its paper denominations, and I'm quite glad we're headed to Italy next, which is another European Union nation. While the bills are the same there, coins will certainly be much different – and if they're anything like the French versions, I'll be chasing those down too! I've already seen a few from Germany, Spain and Greece (I'll talk more about those some other time, when I complete their sets) and I'm quite intrigued.

Although I believe I neglected to mention it earlier, I was able to put together a complete set of coins while in London, every single one, from the lonely penny up through the ranks (2-pence, 5-pence, 10-pence, 20-pence, 50-pence, £1) to the £2 coin in relatively shiny condition. They're all circulated, of course, as I procured them from change received from purchasing tickets, tea, meals and other items throughout the week – so I have no illusions of keeping them protected for value – but they're interesting never-the-less.

Although I'd love to also have representations of each of the bills, considering their worth I can't imagine being able to hold on to them. We're going to be coming back through London at the tail-end of our journey, so if I don't spend them then I'll certainly keep them.

Okay, so, my ears are clean (it's amazing, I can hear again), my bags are packed for Italy, guidebooks being sent home are set aside, and I've updated my journal here. What now? I think, maybe, I'm going to head down to our hostel's lobby and check my email and browse a bit on the internet kiosk they have, and then see about some foods. I'm not sure when Cedric and Maya will be returning so I'm on my own.

I can handle it – I'm a big boy!

Jusque-là! (until then!)



“Retardé Train”

FRIDAY, JANUARY 31st

No, it doesn't mean what you think it does...

Okay, perhaps it does, but not in same context. *Retardé* is the French word to mean a delay, or a holdup and that's what we have here tonight – a stoppage, a setback, an impediment, a blockage.

To make a long sentence short, we're stuck in France!

Furthermore, it's cold as hell here inside Bercy station and there's no getting in out of it. Inside is such a loose term; although I hate to generalize all stations since I've not been to them all here in Paris, it seems all the rail stations are “open-air”, meaning although you walk through glass doors to enter the track terminus, it's more or less a façade. The entire station is open to the elements – the elements tonight being the very cold, damp air and brisk winds whipping around every corner. Thankfully it is no longer snowing, as it was yesterday, or it would really be a mess here. Though does that mean it is colder tonight than yesterday since it's not snowing? I can't be sure, but all I really want to do is find some place warm. As it is people are huddled around the walls as much as possible – there's hardly a place left to sit and stand unless you want to be chilled to the bone.

The only place to get in out of the cold, even for a moment, is the small convenience store located just off the billets room. And they're only letting people stay for a moment, so you can't really go in and loiter about, which sucks. At least I got my five minutes in the warmth earlier. Cedric and I went up to the second level to purchase a few goodies to eat on the train while we waited, and for the following mornings' breakfast. I feel fortunate to have gone up too, because I found some Pocky in stock! Pocky, a snack first sold in Japan in 1965 under the name “Chocoteck” and so named after the sound it makes when bitten (pokkin), has to be one of the most quintessentially recognized Japanese snacks throughout the world.

It's a simple product – a slender biscuit dipped in chocolate – but it has found its way into the most sophisticated hearts and minds of millions worldwide. There are dozens upon dozens of flavors, including but not limited to: Chocolate, Vanilla, Strawberry, Almond Chocolate, Dark (Men's Pocky), and many, many others. I was first introduced to Pocky during the summer of 2000 after an acquaintance of mine advised me to look for a box or two while at EPCOT. It was her favorite, you see, and knowing that I enjoyed chocolate and Japanese things, she thought Pocky would be a sure winner.

Since they sell a lot of Japanese goods (clothes and food products) within the Japanese pavilion at EPCOT, and I lived in close proximity to Walt Disney World, I was sure to find some. I went in one afternoon to check the product out and became instantly hooked on these marvelous chocolate wonders! At first I bought just one box to enjoy, then two. Before long the count began to multiply until I was up to 4 and 5 boxes of mixed flavors a week!

Here, though, Pocky is known as “Mikado” but it’s the same product by Glico. At least there’s one bright spot in this disaster. What a great snack!

Maya also took a turn and came out with some popcorn chips and pamplemousse juice, the French way of saying grapefruit juice.

Since we’re going to be delayed here for quite some time, I don’t see why I shouldn’t take this opportunity to talk about our day, which was far more exciting than this. It was bright, sunny and much warmer. Yeah, I think it may actually brighten my spirits!

* * *

Our routine went about the same this morning as it had the previous mornings here in Paris, at least for me – peach tea and chocolate croissant – save with one difference: packing. Since I was pretty much packed up from the night before, I took to getting the items out I wanted to ship off and writing a few post cards to send back to friends and family back home. Cedric and Maya, however, were ill-prepared... yet again. The two of them can be quite slow in packing, ya know? Cedric not so much since he hasn’t brought a whole lot with him but Maya has packed each item in plastic baggies to help keep her stuff dry in case the bags are subjected to rain, snow, or submergence in the river Thames, Seine or Arno (wherever). It’s certainly a safe thing to do, but it has been my observation that she chucks the baggies from her backpack without thought to re-packing. Therefore, it’s so much more frustrating for her to locate specific items to repack. It’s frustrating to me too – I want to get out there – but it’s also strangely humorous.

I have a dry sense of humour, what can I say?

Eventually they got themselves packed up and we took our packages to the local post office, or in France the *Poste*. In London we used a Mail Boxes, Etc. facility to ship our goods back to our folks in the States but we had absolutely no luck in finding one of those here in Paris. The poste would be just as good, right? With the help of the postal workers, Maya and Cedric had their items weighed, boxed and shipped while I was left out in the cold (no, not literally – it was quite warm inside the post office) without means to get anything done. The two actually used the last two boxes for international shipping the office had! I got so mad that I had to lug that stuff back out I grumbled all the way to lunch, but soon got over it. At least I was able to send off my post cards, so that was a plus anyway, right?

After our little rendezvous at the post office we grabbed a bite to eat at a nearby café. Since we found ourselves back at Place Abbesses we already knew of a number of places to dine. We selected a different café and ate our fill. It really hit the spot too. The food was neither spectacular nor delicious but I was hungry and my sandwich (with an egg on top and fried potatoes) was very good indeed. After settling the bill between us, we took off to Place de l'Opéra, home of the famous Palais Garnier, Paris' opera house, and haunt of the infamous Phantom of the Opera. To get there it was a quick jump on Line 12 of the metro from Abbesses to Saint-Lazare then to Opéra on Line 3.



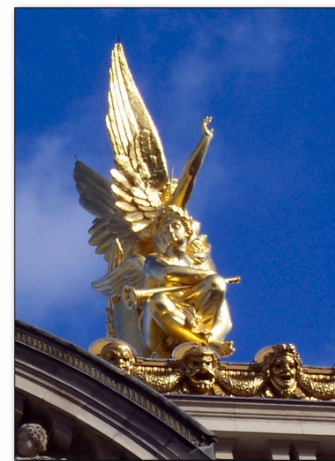
Palais Garnier



It is said that if you sit for long enough at the *Café de la Paix* on *Place de l'Opéra* the whole world will pass you by. And with a quick glance of our surroundings it wasn't hard to understand why. France's top banks were based here, as were a profusion of stores ranging from the chic, exclusive and expensive to popular department and quick convenience stops, which no doubt drew a mixture of commerce and tourism by day. By night, however, the

theaters, cinemas and cafés that peppered these streets must attract a totally different crowd, bringing throngs of life to these historical streets. This afternoon, however, l'Opéra attracted us not for its commerce, or for its shopping, but for the *Opera National de Paris Garnier*, Paris' grand Opera Populaire.

As soon as we arrived at the gates to this magnificent neo-Baroque palace, we were struck. Found at the crux of a number of boulevard junctions at the Place de l'Opéra, for the longest time both Cedric and Maya wanted to tour the Paris Opera House, and here we stood. The reason for this is quite simple and rooted in a musical that the three of us love and now have all seen – *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* (the Phantom of the Opera). The plot of the musical takes place within the Paris Opera House during the 1800's and naturally since we're all fans of Andrew Lloyd Webber's work, we simply could not pass up the opportunity to see the real thing in person. Would we frighten away the ghost of so many years ago with a little illumination, or be responsible for the return of the Phantom once again? And, if so, would we find ourselves at the shores of the populaire's underground hidden lake?



We wondered...

The Palais Garnier is the thirteenth theatre to house the Paris Opera since it was founded by Louis XIV in 1669, did you know that? It was built on the orders of Napoleon III as part of the Great Parisian Reconstruction Project – a monumental undertaking which transformed Paris from a conglomeration of hodge-podge city blocks to a more uniformed and planed capital design. Charles Garnier earned the right to construct the Opera House and construction began in 1860. Unfortunately a number of tragedies interrupted the building work such as the Franco-Prussian war, the fall of the Empire and the rise of the Commune, but work continued. The inauguration was held fifteen years later and its opulence still stands today.



Outside, the Palais is decorated with elaborate marble friezes of various colors, columns, and lavish statuary, many of which portray deities from Greek mythology (such as Apollo with Lyre and Pegasus). Between the columns of the theater's front façade are busts of many of the great composers: Mozart, Rossini, Auber, Beethoven, Meyerbeer, Fromenthal, Halévy, Spontini, and Quinault. But if we thought the outside was richly ornamented we were at a loss for words when gazing upon the Grand Staircase inside the Opera Populaire.

The Grand Staircase is one of the most alluring features of the Palais Garnier. Made of white marble with a balustrade of red and green stone, the double stairway leads to the foyers and the tiered levels of the auditorium. At the foot of the staircase stand two bronze torchères, large female figures brandishing bouquets of light. Above them the sweeping marble stairs branching off are set against a multitude of marble columns, ornamented with cherubs, statuary, lanterns and even more marble. The vaulted domed ceiling containing the staircase is covered with mosaics portraying themes from the history of music. It was simply stunning.



Climbing the stairs we began our exploration. The dress circle boxes can be found on the second floor. Here also is the Rotunde de la Lune, the Avant Foyer, the Grand Foyer, the Loggia, Rotunde de Soleil, Galerie du Glacier, Salon du Glacier, Foyer de la Danse and stage access.

The vast and richly decorated foyers were built to provide the audience with areas to stroll through during intervals. Can you imagine it? The vault of the Avant Foyer is covered with delightful mosaics in sparkling colors on a gold-like background, and lit with a number of fantastic chandeliers, but the Grand Foyer is the most magnificent. Constructed to resemble the gallery of a classical chateau, the Grand Foyer is huge, lavishly ornamented, and strikingly beautiful.



A number of mirrors and windows (which look down the avenue de l'Opéra, toward the Louvre) accentuate its vast dimensions, wonderfully crafted marble columns and statuary (including a bust of Charles Garnier) populate its spaces, and magnificent ceiling mosaics lit by masterfully crafted chandeliers and lanterns complete the opulence of Baroque sumptuousness.



At the end of the gallery can be found the Salon du Glacier, a light and cool rotunda adorned with a ceiling depicting a ring of bacchantes and fauns, and sketches for tapestries illustrating different drinks (such as tea, coffee, orangeade, champagne, etc), as well as fishing and hunting. It has a very distinct 1900s flavor. The Rotonde du Soleil can be found further afield, a darkened area featuring a mosaic of the sun with its rays spread wide and a center ring depicting two dragons intertwined; and the Rotonde de la Lune, a similarly featured rotunda with a central ring featuring black birds and bats.



Through a set of hard-wood doors are the infamous box seats; covered in plush carpeting and seats made of felt. From here the five-tiered auditorium opens up – a riot of red velvet, plaster cherubs, and gold leaf, lit by the immense 8 ton crystal chandelier. It is, of course, the chandelier which features in the famous tale of the Phantom of the Opera.

Although the book by Gaston Leroux and the subsequent musical interpretation by Andrew Lloyd Webber

is fictitious in nature, it is based in some form of truth. In 1896, one of the counter-weights of the chandelier fell, killing someone. This unexplained event, coupled with the underground lake and many other elements, spawned the classic tale. Still, though, it's wonderful to see the chandelier, the stage and the auditorium.

The Italian-style horseshoe-shaped auditorium has 1,900 red velvet seats and magnificent views of the stage, which is 60 meters high and consists of a 45 meter flyover and a 15 meter under-stage area, 27 meters deep and 49 meters wide. No doubt with multiple trap doors present! Other features include a magnificently painted-canvas house curtain, which imitates a draped curtain with gold braid and pompoms, and a backdrop system currently showing a scene from an unknown ballet currently in rehearsal.



The entire Opera Polulaire was a testament to the extravagance of the age, and a joy to tour. We left then with our curiosity fulfilled... but don't think we didn't try and find a passage way to the lake, because we did! Unfortunately that door was bolted shut, and guarded.

Oh well! No Phantom for us!

* * *

Oh mon dieu, can you believe it is snowing now? We were supposed to leave this cursed station at 7:10pm, but here it is 8:30pm and we're still here! Sacrebleu! (Sorry, couldn't resist using an old French profanity.)

In either case, the rest of our day following the Paris Opera House was rather mundane. We left about 4:00pm in search of a bookstore called WH Smith so Maya could look for a specific English-language guidebook on Firenze. She picked up one in London about Paris that proved to be very useful and easy to use and so, naturally, wanted to find same for Florence. Although we found the store near Place de la Concorde, we weren't able to find the book she wanted, though we were awarded last looks at the Obelisk, the Tuileries, the Arc de Triomphe (from afar) and the Eiffel Tower (also from afar). Not to mention one of the worst chocolate crepes I've ever had – and I thought buying one from a street vendor was the best way to get them!

Since we left our bags in the lobby at the hostel, we traveled back there to retrieve them shortly thereafter. Our English, but fluently French-speaking host, bid us *adieu* (farewell) and we dove into the metro station, lugging our stuffs out here to Bercy to catch (or not, as it were) our train.

After quite a long metro ride (and 3 line changes) we arrived at *Gare de Bercy* and this time, thankfully, I learned to take the elevators and watch the signs so I could direct our small group to the correct and, I might add, easier exit into Bercy from the metro station. This, of course, an ordeal from yesterday that I neglected to mention. When we arrived yesterday it wasn't immediately clear which *sortie* (or exit) to take, but rather than stop to take a moment to figure it out, my travel-mates walked off in the direction of the nearest *sortie* without contemplating all of the signs. Had they done so, they would have noticed the one that looked suspiciously like a train symbol at the farther end of the platform, which indicated a separate, possibly direct, and even better, underground entrance into the station.

But I digress...

I was out-voted yesterday, but at least I was listened to today. It saved us a trip up two flights of stairs and walking against the wind across about a hundred yards of terrain from the subway exit to the station doors. Alas, I was also out-voted on a stop-over somewhere in Switzerland, as I had hoped to take. In fact, once it became apparent that the Basel stop wasn't going to happen, my travel-mates didn't really give Geneva a second thought even though it's on the way to Florence! The changes make me wonder if Rome, Venice, Vienna, Amsterdam, and further north are still on our itinerary. I knew it was ambitious when it was put together (mostly by me), but I thought we had all agreed to it.

Apparently not...

Oh, hooray, our train has arrived and is now boarding!

We've got a couchette waiting for us – I certainly hope it's warm. This cold wind and snow is really making me cranky. And I don't want to be...

Adieu Paris, ciao Firenze!